

Exodus 3:1-8. 13-15

1 Corinthians 10:1-6. 10-12

Luke 13:1-9

So far this year in our Sunday Gospels we have been following Jesus as he travels around his home region of Galilee. We have seen him laying the foundations of his Father's kingdom on earth through his teaching, preaching and healing in Galilee. Starting his public ministry at home is a powerful way of declaring that our opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God is always in the present time and place, where we are here and now, not in some other place in the future.

In today's Gospel we join Jesus as he heads for Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem that his public ministry will reach its climax in that great act of self-giving love through his death and resurrection that we celebrate every Sunday, and with added solemnity at Easter. There will be challenges, distractions and temptations on the way to Jerusalem, but Jesus has now set his sights firmly on his destination and he resolutely makes his way there.

Luke tells us that, as Jesus walks to Jerusalem, thousands of people come out to meet him. In fact, there were so many crowding around him they were in danger of being trampled. It is out of this crowd that people emerge to tell him that Pilate has martyred some of his fellow Galileans who had been visiting the temple in Jerusalem.

At this point it is helpful to put ourselves in Jesus' position and ask ourselves how we would have reacted to this news.

I think that some of us would have been very angry and publicly denounced Pilate for such a barbaric act against our fellow countrymen. While that might have made us, and some of our followers, feel better it would also have given the security forces adequate justification to arrest us and stop us ever reaching Jerusalem and completing our mission.

Others of us might have been more prudent and decided to lie low in the hope that the important mission of opening God's love to all people could be put off to a later time when things were a bit more peaceful.

But Jesus chooses neither of these options. He doesn't engage in a confrontational style of communication that only makes situations worse. Neither does he avoid the danger and stay at home till it all cools down. Instead he changes the whole direction of the conversation and makes it an opportunity for grace and growth.

He starts by dismissing the notion, which many at that time would have believed, that bad things happen to people as a punishment for their wrong doing. He reinforces this by placing the reported incident into a much wider context. He refers to another catastrophe where 18 people lost their lives when a tower collapsed. Jesus emphasises that bad things happen in this world but never as a punishment from God.

He then goes on to tell us that we are all sinners in need of repentance and conversion to God's way of living and loving.

In the parable that closes today's Gospel we are confronted with two very different schools of thought. The first one is the attitude of the vineyard owner who is not prepared to give growing space to a fig tree that doesn't bear fruit quickly. The second school of thought is much more loving and patient. The gardener in the parable is willing to take the time to nurture the fig tree and help it realise its true potential, bearing fruit.

In our lives we are faced with a choice between

- the way of the world that demands instant results from each of us whatever the cost, or
- the way of God who is patient and willing to help each one of us realise our true potential.

The choice is quite simply ours. We can choose the way of the world or the way of God.

If we wish to choose the way of God, then how do we go about it? We have already seen a strong clue in the way that Jesus started his public ministry in his home town and the surrounding region of Galilee. **We start our journey to God from where we are now.**

This is illustrated in a beautifully poetic way by the story of Moses and the burning bush that we heard in the first reading from the book of Exodus. Moses is going about his day to day business of looking after his father in law's sheep when he sees **a bush that is blazing but not being burnt up.**

This image is a powerful one that can point us to the self-giving love of God for his creation, that is never exhausted, and which reaches its climax in Jesus when he gives himself completely in love on his arrival in Jerusalem. The love of God for his creation can still be seen all around us, if we follow the example of Moses and look out for the signs that point to it.

So, as we gather together for Mass today, we are like Moses before the burning bush. We respectfully gather before the sacrament and symbols that point us towards the infinite and everlasting love of God. As we partake of this sacrament let us open ourselves to the nurturing love of God, allowing Him to change our hearts and minds so that we too will bear fruit that will last.

When we move out of Church at the end of Mass let us resolve to take with us the flame of God's love, and keep it burning in the way we help our neighbours, young or old, sick or healthy, rich or poor, to realise their full potential and bear fruit as children of God.