

March 7, 2010

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

How much time is left?

READINGS: Esther 3:1-8a,13-15; Ps. 102;1 Cor. 10:1-6,10-12; LK. 13:1-9

From the Gospel according to Luke

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Silo'am fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

IS MY LIFE BEAUTIFUL?

Of all the questions we ask God, the most mistaken begin with the word "why". Why do the innocent suffer? Why do young people die, babies, workers on the job? The people of Jesus' time asked him about the death of those poor people killed by the soldiers of Pilate ~ what did their death accomplish, or the death of the eighteen upon whom the tower at Siloam fell? When a Hebrew asked this type of question, he was not questioning the existence of God, which for him is most clear; he is asking about the moral state of those who died: if they died like that, then they must have committed some secret sin that required expiation. Jesus eliminated the connection between sin and disgrace: the person who suffers most painful trials in life does not necessarily receive them as a punishment from God. So then, why should one die like this? The Teacher does not answer this 'why'; he re-asks the question changing it to 'how'. How long a person lives or in what circumstances one dies is not important; what is important is to know that if I do not convert, I might continue to live, but my life will have the taste of death, of something accidental, of randomness. If I refuse to love, I am already dead, even if I live to be a hundred years old. God does not evaluate the quality of our existence with a calendar in hand, but with the measurement of the fruits of the Spirit: where there is peace, joy, benevolence, affability, then life is beautiful, and it is worth living. Otherwise, to die in an accident at the age of thirty, or, to die peacefully at ninety in one's sleep really does not make much difference. If I do not have charity I will be sterile as a fig tree full of leaves but with no fruit, whether I am thirty years old or one hundred. Jesus began a totally new way to evaluate human existence. How do I evaluate my existence? What do my birthdays mean to me? When can I say: "my life is beautiful"? When we place ourselves before death, do we foolishly think: when my time comes, I will have had enough time to carry out my beautiful "apostolic" plans? This is a pagan way of thinking. The true question to ask is: how much time do I still have at my disposition to convert myself to love, to pardon, to goodness? Let us ask God not for more days of life, but for life for the days we have. Life in the Spirit.

Father Giuseppe Forlai, igs

Prayer

Lord, you are our Rock.

When we are far from you, we are like houses built on sand.

But there are days on which we don't think of you:

make our hearts always vigilant, so that we never lose the strength we gained on the days when we were rooted in you.

May the sweet strength we draw from your presence remain with us and may we know how to taste it, guard it, give it and seek it always.