

THE POWER OF REPENTANCE



Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Lent 2022 we have seen the devil's strategy: to divide and scatter. Jesus wants to bring us together, to help us achieve proper focus, to put God first. As Jesus says, to serve God alone. When we do that everything else falls into place.

Last week we saw a powerful way to focus: by gratitude - thanking God for things great and small, even for the troubles that God allows as part of his providence. We saw the example of St. Patrick who Irish pirates kidnapped and sold into slavery. He discerned the hand of God even in that miserable experience, and he kept his focus.

We see something similar in today's Gospel. They bring Jesus news of Pilate murdering some Galileans and mixing their blood with sacrifices. This refers to him sending Roman soldiers into the Temple to capture some presumed rebels. The soldiers kill them, and their blood mixes with blood of lambs. A horrific sacrilege, a sickening outrage. These kinds of outrages would lead to the Jewish Revolt and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

How does Jesus respond? Does he issue a condemnation? No, he brings it back to the personal: "If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did."

Jesus responds similarly to news of a tower collapsing killing 18 people. He tells his listeners: don't think you are superior those who died in that disaster. You know, there's something in us when we hear about another person's misfortune, maybe a heart attack. We ask: Did he smoke? Eat too much red meat? Refuse to see a doctor?

We want to blame the victim - and think we are above it. That way of thinking can apply when we hear about some disaster like an airplane crash or a terrorist attack. That could never happen to us! But of course, it could!

In the Second Reading St. Paul speaks about the fragility of our existence. "Whoever thinks he is standing firm should take care not to fall." We need to repent, refocus our lives.

Last week we saw refocus in terms of citizenship. God wants us to be good citizens. If we can do something to help a fellow human we should do it - thoughtfully and prayerfully. At the same time, recognize our true citizenship. Set our eyes on the prize - eternity. To obtain the prize requires repentance - turning to God. C.S. Lewis expressed it this way:

"Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor-that is the only way out of a 'hole.' This process of surrender - this movement full speed astern - is repentance."

So, Jesus tells us what to do when we hear about outrages and disasters - not to think we are somehow superior to the victims, but that we should examine our own hearts. Jesus warns, "If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did" or as St. Paul says, "Whoever thinks he is standing firm should take care not to fall."

Have a Blessed Third Week of Lent 2022!

Rev. Rafal Ligenza

Pastor — St. Joseph Parish