

III LENT– 24th March 2019

**.. UNLESS YOU REPENT. YOU WILL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH –  
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

*Link video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCMms5W0HFc>*

**Luke 13,1-9**

***There were some present at that very time who told him about 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 in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; 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, ‘Look, for three years now 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, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”***

Every time Jesus tries to free the people suddenly there appears those that are contrary to this liberation. It is what emerges in Luke’s gospel chapter 13, 1-9 – it is an episode that only this evangelist has.

Jesus had said to the crowd *“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?”* ( Luke 12. 57)

Jesus tries to emancipate the people from the influence and the doctrine of the scribes and the Pharisees. It is the religious authorities that determine what people must believe and how they must believe, what they must practice.

Then Jesus invites people to grow, to be mature people, who reason with their own heads and walk with their own legs. This is inadmissible for the religious power that must always subdue the people, treating them as in a childish way. And here's the reaction.

*“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans...”* To say "Galileans" at the time of Jesus did not only indicate the origin from a particular region. Galileans means "revolutionary" and indicated the Zealots, the terrorists of the time. We remember the great revolt of Judas the Galilean that is written in the Acts of the Apostles. Then *“..who told him about the Galileans...”* - Jesus is a Galilean – *“.. whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.”*

So Jesus is trying to free the people from the influence of the religious authorities and this threat comes to him, a mafia-style warning: "Attention Galileo, those Galileans who are here with us will come to a very bad end". Well, not only does Jesus not let himself be intimidated, but he goes on the attack, reacting. *"And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? "*

Jesus denies the connection that sees punishment as an action on the part of God to punish the sins of men. *"No, I tell you; but unless you repent,.."* meaning if you do not change your life. Repentance in the gospels means to put the well being of others as the principle value of one's own existence, *"... you will all likewise perish."* So Jesus says "No, beware! It is you who, if you do not change your life, you will come to a bad end ". But not only. Now Jesus continues. If he first gave a general example, pointing to the Galileans, he is now in Jerusalem and speaks of that city, of Jerusalem.

*"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell ... "* Siloam is a part of Jerusalem, and even today the base of this tower that fell can still be seen *"...and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? "* Here if the first example was for the Galileans, now Jesus takes it right there where he speaks of Jerusalem

*"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* Jesus reaffirms what was said earlier. So Jesus strictly excludes the divine punishment and invites them again to conversion. And then Jesus expands the theme and here is an answer to John who was the last heir of this tradition who saw God as the one who punished sinners. We remember that John the Baptist had said: *"Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*(Luke 3,9)

Here Jesus widens the discourse and continues. *" And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard,"* The fig tree and the vineyard in the Old Testament are images of Israel, of the people of Israel. *"..and he came seeking fruit on it and found none."* Here we have seen John the Baptist said that if it does not bear fruit it is cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus does not agree. *And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years.. "* the three representing the complete time, *"...now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?'* and this is the action of Jesus that is contrary to an action that destroys and punishes. Jesus did not come to destroy, but to bring life, to give life.

*“And he answered him,... ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.*

The reaction of Jesus in front of sinners, sterile people and those who do not bear fruit, is not a punitive but life-giving action, it still offers new possibilities to bear fruit, to bring life, and not only offers this possibility, but collaborates to make this happen.

He continues :*Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”*

Jesus’ God, that Luke presents to us, is the God for whom nothing is impossible. As he had written at the moment of the Annunciation : it is the sixth month for Elizabeth, Mary's relative, whom everyone said was sterile. Here too is a tree that seems barren, for the action of God and for the collaboration of man, it can bear fruit.

Luca's teaching is very clear and precise. To those who see a relationship between sin and punishment, Jesus proclaims in a clear, exhaustive and definitive manner that God's action with sinners is not punitive, destructive, but life-giving.