



Every age has “breaking news,” and the means by which it travels and is received. Then as now, what most easily steal the focus are reports of evils in the world in both senses of the word – either natural disasters or human atrocities. There is no news like bad news, and in Roman times as today focus on events consists of two parts: news and commentary.

In today’s Gospel Our Lord has been teaching when persons unnamed come to give him their report on what seems to have been a quite recent evil of the human kind –

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

“Master, Master! Did you hear the news about Pilate killing those Galilean?” They have run to Jesus with a news-flash, hoping to focus his attention on it and to give his comment.

To appreciate fully the coolness of his reaction, we should consider the what has occurred. The victims are Galileans, whose residence is far to the north. The reference to sacrifices, however tells us that they have come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to observe a holy festival. While they are staying in the city for this sacred purpose, the Roman governor commits an atrocity, an act of state-sponsored terrorism against the Jews, and because they have come there on for a religious festival these Galileans get massacred.

But what does Christ say in response to this news, the kind of which always excites public attention and sparks commentary and debate without end? Twice he declares:

“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Christ was born on Mary, appeared at the Jordan, and labored for three years to offer the world the gift of repentance, that confessing their sins and believing in him men and women consigned to death and hell might escape the wrath of God and, instead, live forever in his Kingdom. This was at that moment and at every moment Jesus’s focus,

and it should be ours.

In 1948 Wyndham Lewis, painter & author, looked at our growing world of mass communication and coined the phrase – “*global village.*” A world in which everyone is now able to find out all the news about anybody else anywhere. He wrote this about 20 years after the first TV broadcast, and he died about 30 years before the birth of cable news. In a world focused on kidnaping, quakes, and killers, even the weather report strives to grab our attention by renaming itself, “*Storm Watch.*” Mass communication springs into the air from sensational headlines, then dives into the pool of to global gossip – 24-hour reports on a drowning here, a sex-scandal there, a death-by-overdose there. And what is the pretense? It is that, the more bad news we hear, the more recent the details, the more debates about the news we expose ourselves to, the more we grasp the truth of life! The more information that flows into us, the more reports we absorb, the wiser we are!

There were some present at that very time who reported to him on the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

It’s not hard for us to imagine how Fox News or CNN would have covered that one.

Jesus responds in the most unexpected way, by showing almost no interest at all in the facts of the story. Instead, he goes to the heart of all human events, the question of where we stand before God. He replies in terms of human sin and divine judgment:

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”

Suddenly he has shifted everybody’s attention away from all the supposedly important details of the story – *How many died? Has Pilate’s office issued a statement? Have we heard from the family members – or the lawyers – of the Galilean victims? What kinds of animals were being used in the sacrifices? Let’s go to our man on the scene!* Jesus will have none of this, but instead asks them:

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?”

Disasters of nature and of human behavior happen every day. There are criminals in

alleys and criminals in the Senate. Every day somebody's apartment building burns down, or a bridge in some foreign country collapses. What we cannot do, in any ultimate way, is make sense of such things. And if we think that we're going to arrive at an understanding of life by delving into as many details of as many news stories as possible, we are fools!

Christ offers an alternative news story; he has news for the crowd and for us: The whole human race is perishing:

...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

He's not talking about your car blowing up when you get into it after church – although that could happen. No, Christ is talking about God's final judgment of your life. And when he brings up the news story about the Tower of Siloam collapsing on eighteen victims, his point is not that unless you repent a tower is going to fall on you – but that unless you repent God's judgment is going to fall on you, something far worse than any earthly disaster!

And so he calls his audience – he calls us – to repentance. God wants all to be saved. God desires for everyone the forgiveness of their sins. He desires to see everyone delivered from the power of the grave itself, and so he warns us, “Unless you repent, this disaster that you see on the news are mere pictures of the eternal disaster that awaits your life.”

But here we have trouble, because we think repentance is something that only two classes of people need to do. Class #1 consists of people who feel guilty. If my conscience is dark and I am haunted by memories of my past actions, I should go to confession so that I'll feel better. Class #2 is people whose obvious crimes are known to others: they need to come out and confess their crimes and ask others to forgive them.

It never occurs to us that, even if we're not feeling guilty at the moment, and if no one's demanding our apology, we need to be repenting. But this is the exact point that Christ makes in today's Gospel to a crowd of ordinary people: You should be living, every single day, a life of repentance! Now, what does this mean?

Every day you grow deaf to God's will and act as if he did not exist. Every day you

speak and act in such a way as to live for one thing – yourself. And the worst thing you can do is say to yourself, “Oh, but I don’t have to worry, I go to church, I’m a Christian. I know I’m saved.” For little by little – and eventually the speed picks up! – such a person drifts totally out of communication with God.

And so, those sudden disasters that we hear about in the news do serve us in this way: They remind us how quickly we could be brought before the judgment seat of Christ. What if the Big Disaster were to strike my life tonight? What if in the next hour God suddenly took me out of this world, ended my mortal life, and stood me before his bench? What if I’m being judged at noon today on the basis of how I have thought & behaved in the last 24 hours?

And so our Lord now brings us to quite a different way of looking at life. The Big News is not all the catastrophes that occur in the world during any given week, but the fact that week after week nothing horrible happens to the vast majority of people. This is what his parable about the fruitless fig tree is telling us: The amazing thing, the real news in the world every single day, is all the people who are deaf to God that he doesn’t destroy. The most shocking news on any given day is how a just and holy God declines from giving us sinners what we deserve. Instead he blesses even all evil people with daily bread and more, in the desire that sooner or later they will turn to him, repent, and live.

If you want to be wise about life and the world, spend relatively little of your time following the news – and much more of it taking inventory of two things: How merciful God has been to you and all people, and how little gratitude you have shown him by your behavior. To live daily before God in those terms – measuring both his goodness and your wrongness while under the forgiving grace that he gives you in Christ – is to live the repentant life. It will be a fruitful life in terms of what he seeks to receive from you.