

In our society, warnings are very familiar to all of us. Product warnings are on almost everything we buy. “Do not drink the Drano, pour it down the sink.” Advertisements for “over the counter” health and beauty aids end with the inevitable and ominous “use only as directed.” Jesus offers some warnings of his own.

The first is that every tragedy does not signify a sin. The example involved some people in Galilee who were executed by Pontius Pilate in an especially gruesome way. They had been protesting him taking money from the Temple to pay for a water aqueduct. Well, they paid in blood. The second tragedy to which the Lord refers involved some people who were killed by a tower that collapsed.

In speaking of these two tragedies, one an atrocity perpetrated by a public official, the other an accident, the Lord says that these people were not necessarily the greatest sinners in Galilee. Every tragedy does not signify a sin. *Though we don’t want to be found in sin in the event of such a tragedy!

We can, of course, apply all of this to our own time as it would look the same in our headlines: “Building collapses, many feared dead or Isis murders a number of innocent villagers.” These events remind us that life is precious and precarious. Tragedy and death are part of life. It literally happened while Jesus walked the streets. People who die because of the violence of a troubled individual or who die in accidents remind us that we cannot take our life for granted. Life is fragile and can thus be brief.

+I do wonder if those who died in the tornado thought much that that day would be their last day on earth?

We don’t have forever to say the things we have to say or to do the things we are called to do. These tragedies also show us that the circumstances of our life are sometimes out of our control. Every time we drive on an expressway, turn on the ignition, board a plane or take a drug we give up some control.

+I was in a car accident about ten years ago and was a hair away from death. My whole life at that moment was laid wide open for all to see. How I left my house all would know, but more importantly, how I had morally lived my life was there to be seen. If I had died, all my life was there to be seen and I could not go back and change it or hide it.

The second teaching of the Lord is that although every tragedy does not signify a sin, every sin is a tragedy. We may not completely control the circumstances of our life but we can make decisions about the circumstances of our soul.

We have natural disasters, but we also have spiritual disasters. Through sin we can cut off God's life, unleash spiritual disaster, and give birth to a spiritual cancer that can affect everything we do. Spiritual collapse comes not from things that happen to us but from things we do. The Lord is teaching us that every tragedy does not signify a sin but every sin is a tragedy, a tragedy which we can avoid.

+D.L. Moody put it best, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than any other man I know."

+In his Divine Comedy, the Italian poet Dante describes an imaginative journey through hell, purgatory and heaven. At the end of his tour of hell, he approaches the very bottom of hell. And here he finds people forever trapped next to whomever in life they hated most. In his epic poem, what is most striking is that the bottom of hell is not fire but ice, people frozen in hatred, resentments, rebellion; even tears of sorrow are forever frozen on their faces.

*Hell is a radical example of my freedom. Every tragedy does not signify a sin but every sin is a tragedy.

Lastly, the Lord speaks about a fig tree that doesn't produce but is given more time. It is given more time to do what it is supposed to do. This is not earth shaking, as God does not demand the impossible. The fig tree was only required to produce figs. No more. You and I are asked only to accomplish what our natural gifts allow, but we are asked to accomplish just that.

+Garrison Keillor warns us, "You can become a Christian by going to church just as about easily as you can become an automobile by sleeping in a garage."

What we're speaking of is the danger of presumed spiritual security or to be complacent in our faith. As St. Paul said, "Let anyone who thinks he is standing upright watch out lest he fall." Our parable says that we're not just here to suck up oxygen. It is a clear warning against a fruitless existence in the light of God's grace given to us.

The brevity of life should call us to take seriously the time we are given to know, love and serve the Lord in this life and so be happy with him forever in the next. Tragedies about which we read in the newspaper or see on television should remind us that we don't have forever.

*Perhaps we might ask ourselves every day after waking up, “Is today going to be the day, Lord?” Act as if each day is your last on earth. Leave a mark to be remembered for the good we did, before you go. Man up (or woman up) to your Christian faith!

We came into life at the peril of someone else’s life; and we would never have survived without the care of those who loved us. We have inherited a Christian civilization and a freedom which we did not create. There is laid on us the duty of handing things on better than we found them. ‘Die when I may,’ said Abraham Lincoln, ‘I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow.’ That he did.

This Gospel is a wake-up call, a warning more serious than the warnings on Drano or cigarette packs. The Lord warns us that every tragedy does not signify a sin. But every sin is a tragedy, an avoidable tragedy. The disasters in our life may not be in our control, but disaster to our soul most certainly is!