

Lessons for Third Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2016

Psalm 85 (*antiphon: v. 8*) – *An expression of confidence in God's unfailing love even in suffering.*

Ezekiel 33:7-20 – *Ezekiel was sent to warn the house of Israel and call them to return to God's love.*

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 – *The example of Israel's sin and suffering serves as a warning to us.*

Luke 13:1-9 – *Suffering around us should draw us to God's protecting care and redeeming love.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: Open Your Eyes in Suffering!

God sent Ezekiel to proclaim to the people of Israel that their sufferings did not indicate God's rejection, but rather His call for them to return to Him. God's ways are not in question, but the wayward ways of sinners. St. Paul reminds his readers that many Israelites forsook God and perished; their sufferings serve as warnings for us. Jesus explained that when suffering is seen in the light of God's love, it is an invitation for the sufferer to seek comfort and courage in God's steadfast mercy. Suffering opens our eyes to the presence of God in our lives.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Gracious God, help me remember that suffering in my life is not a sign of Your displeasure but a loving call to repentance. Help me see the suffering in Jesus' life as a sign of Your love that He would share my life and my sin. Help me be a servant to others to ease their burdens of suffering and to call them to Your love. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: God provides us with material blessings to sustain us in life and to ease the sufferings of those who travel beside us through life. We are His hands to reach out to the hurting and sorrowful.

OFFERING PRAYER: Lord, in our sorrows You are near,
And when we're lost You hold us dear.
Give each of us strong hearts to care
For those who suffer anywhere. Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: When we suffer affliction, we think God is not fair. Why should we undergo such trials when others seem to have comfortable lives? Such an attitude is a reversal of the relationship of Creator to creation. In other words, it is idolatry. We make ourselves the judge of God's ways. When we understand our place before God correctly, we see God's hand as he sustains us in suffering. That is how God comes to us in the death of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' suffering, God reaches out to claim us and cleanse us. When we suffer in Christ, we are drawn closer to God's love.