

REPENTANCE

MARCH 24, 2019

Perhaps no more important words by Jesus were ever spoken to his disciples than these: *I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that, have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!* Jesus refers here to God (not Satan); he who alone judges our soul between salvation and damnation. Jesus builds on this imperative in today's Gospel account. He notes: Pilgrims killed by the malicious violence of Pilate while offering sacrifice in worship; innocents crushed in those same Temple precincts when a tower collapses. To the mind of that age, both would have been considered signs of God's disfavor and something to be feared. Our Lord disagrees and pronounces the dead no more (or less) at risk than you or I. For an unexpected death, as common now as then, exposes all of us to the potential of an unprepared-for judgement and with judgement, no plea deals are possible. At our death, we are simply revealed to be what we have made ourselves to be.

Since we cannot avoid death and it often comes unexpected, the remedy of Christ is simple: Repent. Now. Delayed repentance is no repentance and in fact procrastination is one of the most insidious of the enemy's tricks. He would convince us that we have all the time in the world. We do not. In fact, time is running all too short. John the Baptist knew this two thousand years ago as he prepared people for the imminent coming of the Messiah: *You brood of vipers!* he says. *Bear fruit that befits repentance for even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree; every tree therefore that does not bear*

good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

My friends, as Christians we have all been baptized with this holy fire. I wonder, have we borne fruit commensurate with this gift? If not, why not? Consider this: No one on earth will be judged more strictly than us here, for we have received the fullness of truth and the full assistance of the sacraments. After reflection, should you still choose to receive Holy Communion today, remember that you bear witness to God thereby that you are even now prepared to be judged and that the tree of your life has indeed brought forth abundant fruit for the Kingdom of God. If this is not the case, perhaps it is time to repent anew and to pay a visit to the confessional.