

## THE SALMON RETURN

In the last weeks we have seen some massive disasters, by earthquake, in Haiti and in Chile. Our gospel reading today refers to two disasters, and to the spiritual lesson Jesus wishes to teach us – that we are to repent.

Think about the following situations from history:

- In the first place, about the time this Parish church of St Mary's was built, in 1848, the Thames River in London at that time came to be dead and stinking. The River was 'dead' in the sense that up to that time, salmon regularly traveled up the river. By the mid 1800s, however, the salmon could no longer survive because the River Thames had been so badly polluted by sewers and by the effluents from the factories of the industrial revolution. That great River had 'died', and it stank. Could that human caused disaster in the River Thames possibly be repaired?
- Secondly, we have even greater challenges today. For, there is a huge floating mass of garbage in the Pacific Ocean, 1000 miles west of California, and 1000 miles north of Hawaii. Some people say the floating mass of garbage is the size of Cuba, and others say that it is larger than Texas. Furthermore, there are five such floating accumulations of trash in the oceans of the world, containing waste (especially plastic) from many nations of the world. Can we possibly repair this human caused disaster?

In our gospel reading today, there are two disasters. The political leader Pilate carried out the first of the two disasters. The second one was the collapse of the Tower of Siloam, in which several people died. Humans played a part in causing both of these two disasters.

In this gospel reading, the emphasis is upon these words of Jesus: Firstly, that life contains disasters in which (whatever the actual cause, still) the *victims* are not at fault. Secondly, the words of Jesus, which were repeated twice, "Unless you repent, you will perish in the same way."

It appears that Jesus meant this: That by conscious thought, reflection, prayer, and, accordingly, a change of action, there can be a good outcome from a life, even when disasters of any kind take place, or when our lives end in an unexpected way.

Certainly, Jesus himself died a very difficult death. Surely, his death was far from happenstance, far from simply tragic, and far from futile. Rather, his death brought forgiveness, life, love, and hope to a countless throng of people.

This period of Lent is devoted to the idea of self-examination and repentance. It is devoted to the idea of being prepared to meet God, to ensure that we do what we can do to make our peace with God, with other people, and indeed with the environment as well. When we do so, our Psalm for today (Ps 103) states those famous words, "Far as East is from West, so far has God put our offences away from us."

When we repent, our sins are all gone. This psalm says that God “pardons all my guilt and heals all my suffering” (Ps 103v3).

As an illustration of the effects of repentance, I would like to return to the River Thames. After 150 years of slow but steady cleaning up and restoring the River Thames, the salmon have recently returned to this River.

In the same way, as difficult as it may be, or as long as it may take, still, we too can indeed repent of things we have not done well. There is no doubt a great deal to clean up in our own lives, in our communities, and in the world at large. With the help of God and one another, we can clean up: Bit-by-bit, step-by-step, and day-by-day. The effort, however great it may be, is still worth it. The effect will not be futile, but rather, the effect will be very good. The salmon will come back. Joy will return.

The challenge from our gospel reading today is this: Are we ready to name what is wrong in our lives and to do something about those things? Let us take to heart the words of Jesus: “Unless you repent, you shall all perish in the same way.”

In the name of Christ, Amen.

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