

The headlines of Jesus' disasters (i.e. tower falls killing...) could certainly be substituted with ours today: "Dictator Assad gasses his own people!" "Building crumbles scores feared dead!"

Both then and now we all want answers as to why such things happen.

Back in Jesus' day the why explanation would be that they must have been sinful to have died this way. We hear that today from that Westboro Baptist Church, which believes that all disasters and catastrophes are from the hand of God because we deserve it and that "God hates America."

One might notice that Jesus does not try to answer the why of it all, but he does clearly tell us that not all disasters or deaths are the will of God. A 3-year-old gassed by Assad is not God's will.

But Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5:45 that God "makes the sun rise on the bad and the good and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." Jesus was the most innocent of all human beings and his life ended in a horrific way.

However, Jesus' death and resurrection will be the answer for all of the innocent who die in every one of our headlines.

+Let's imagine there is are newspapers in heaven (opened after the resurrection of Jesus) reporting the same events that transpired in our gospel: "Fifteen enter the kingdom of heaven after tower collapses" or "Pilate attacks the earthly body, yet scores enter the kingdom of God."

Another article features a snap shot of a woman embracing Jesus and is titled, "After a courageous battle with cancer, woman finds her true physician" and another "Husband and wife reunite... Lost child in the arms of his parents."

There would be other articles, such as "Not all arrived, as some were caught off guard and grounded to purgatory." Lastly, "Justice for heinous crimes of dictator and is never heard of again! Victims seen pointing at him as he goes."

Deaths are also our reminders to those who may need to change course. Jesus' condemnation, "But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will perish." Every person is admonished to change her or his way of thinking and respond to God's grace. The message is clear, however, that we only have one life to do so.

+Father Steven Scheier should have died on Oct. 18, 1985, in a collision while traveling back to his parish in the Diocese of Wichita, Kan. He suffered a major concussion and fractured vertebrae of the neck. Doctors gave him little chance to survive.

But he did. One day when celebrating Mass, the Gospel was today's Gospel about the fig tree. While proclaiming the Gospel, the page became illuminated, enlarged and came off the lectionary toward Fr. Scheier. He finished Mass as best he could and back at the rectory remembered a spiritual conversation that had taken place shortly after the accident.

In that conversation Fr. Scheier found himself standing before the judgment of Jesus. He doesn't know how long it lasted. He says the Lord took him through his entire life and showed him how he had failed in his priestly service. Fr. Scheier said "yes" to everything Jesus said about his life. His judgement was upon him.

However, he heard the voice of Our Lady, who called out to her Son, to give him more time, more graces, after which Jesus said, "Mother, he's yours." From that day on, came fruit from that tree.

Positively, Jesus' warning can be seen as an invitation to a new life in the days that are given to us. When he was talking to the people in the passage, he was not saying, "Do this or else I'll throw you off the cliff."

He was saying, "You cannot have life unless you turn to me. I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the light, and no one comes to the Father except through me."

What Jesus was saying was this: "I didn't come here just to give you explanations of what happens around you. I'm here to tell you how transformation can happen within you, and once you experience that, your entire worldview will change—and suddenly you'll realize the tragedies you see around the world are not proof I don't exist, but the very evidence of how much you need me."

While God does not protect us from bad things in our life, he promises us that we are never alone and that we will always have him. In the birth of Jesus, he is also named Immanuel, meaning "God is with us."

+UVA made it over the first hurdle in their opening round of the NCAA tournament. We might recall what happened last year, where the number one seeded UVA lost in a blowout to the 16th seed for the first time in the history of March Madness.

Afterward, Tony Bennett addressed the loss: "You certainly feel things and things bother you, but where does peace and perspective come from? I always tell our guys, it has to be something unconditional. I know I have that in the love of my family. And I know I have that in my faith." That is what carried him and hopefully carry him in tonight's game!

+On a much more tragic note, William Barclay, the venerable Scottish scholar, in his spiritual biography, writes about losing his 21-year-old daughter and her fiancé who were drowned in a boating accident.

He writes, "God did not stop that accident at sea, but he did still the storm in my own heart so that somehow my wife and I came through that terrible time still on our own two feet."

No one can say what it means to lose a loved one until you experience it yourself. However, many of us know grief and pain. Our faith tells us what Jesus did and continues to do – he became incarnate in our grief and sadness and raises it up and redeems it.

Jesus is never absent and so we can be sure to know that for the faithful, in the end, all will be well, and our pain will someday be redeemed in God's embrace and in that embrace, all of our questions, our "whys" will be answered.