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Burundian volunteers serve food to displaced families at Rugombo Stadium in Burundi, Feb. 18, 2025, after Congolese fled from renewed clashes between M23 rebels and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (OSV News/Reuters/Evrard Ngendakumana)



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[Psalm 10](#) cries out to God, "Why do you stand afar and pay no heed in times of trouble? Arrogant scoundrels pursue the poor ... The wicked boast of their greed ... their affairs always succeed!"

How many God-loving people feel that way today? Victims of wars, the hungry whose aid is disappearing, and so many others echo the psalmist's cry, "The helpless are crushed ... Rise up, Lord! Do not forget the poor!"

In the end, the psalmist expresses faith and hope, saying, "But you do see; you take note of misery and sorrow ... To you the helpless can entrust their cause."

This psalm, which feels so appropriate right now, could have been inspired by our reading from Exodus. Moses encountered God in an unquenchable, nondestructive fire, and God, expressing divine passion, said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people ... have heard their cry ... I know well what they are suffering."

Third Sunday of Lent

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Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

Psalm 103

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Luke 13:1-9

Today, many people doubt that.

Today's readings take us into the heart of what causes many to be atheists or skeptical about the existence of a good God. While Jesus was freely journeying toward his ultimate confrontation with evil ([Luke 9:51](#)), people questioned him about sin and suffering. Aghast and titillated by hearing about how Pontius Pilate had not only slaughtered a group of worshippers but then mixed their blood with the temple

sacrifices, they asked the implicit question, "What had those people done that God allowed them to perish in that way?"

Apparently, they believed that God protects the good, that those who live in safety and enjoy health and wealth are blessed by God. Those who suffer must somehow deserve it.

Even Paul seems to accept that theory when he says of the people in the desert, "God was not pleased ... for they were struck down in the desert." Note: Paul does not say, "God punished them by letting them perish." Paul said that their behavior was not pleasing to God — leaving open the possibility that their waywardness itself both displeased God and led to their demise.

Jesus then took the question one step further, citing the accident of a tower that collapsed and killed 18 people. Would God have allowed such things to happen if the victims were innocent?

By placing this incident in the context of Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem, Luke frames it as an introduction to the mystery of Jesus' coming suffering at the hands of ignorant and evil people with power.

How could people understand the death of those who perished in the temple or were crushed by the falling tower? Were they abandoned by God?

Jesus tells the crowd, "If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did." What kind of "repentance" is Jesus calling for?

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Repentance, *metanoia*, is not about penance; it describes a change of mindset. Jesus preached *metanoia* to encourage people to open their eyes to perceive God's love active among them, the ways God was reigning in their midst.

The belief that God punishes sinners with disaster assumes that we earn our salvation, that God will care for us to the extent that we are good. That might feel fine to the healthy wealthy (as long as they stay that way), but it reflects nothing of the situation of Jesus on the cross or of martyrs like Peter and Paul, St. [Óscar Romero](#) or the "holy innocents."

It seems that rather than shielding the good from evil (one of the traps with which Satan tempted Jesus), God suffers with the suffering. God told Moses, "I see my people's suffering, I hear their cry against injustice." Because God saw, heard and knew intimately what they suffered, God sent Moses to save the people.

Jesus claimed that he too represented God: "*The Spirit has anointed me to proclaim liberty to captives.*" God's saving action doesn't fly down from the clouds, it comes through people the Spirit moves and empowers to act in the name of the God of life, the God who is love.

What do these readings offer us as we reach the halfway stage of our Lenten journey? First, they warn us against judging others, reminding us that nobody deserves the life God gives us and that God is never the source of suffering.

They tell us that God is not far, precisely because we who see suffering are commissioned to act like Moses and to know, like Jesus, that the Spirit of God empowers us to act in God's name. If we believe that, we're preaching the Gospel by living in *metanoia*.

This story appears in the **Lent 2025** feature series. [View the full series.](#)

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