

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens” (Eccl 3:1). God has determined the appropriate moment or “time” for various human activities. “Human beings cannot know that moment; further, the wider course of events and purposes fixed by God are beyond them as well.”ⁱ

The prophets of the old testament called people to holiness time and again and promised the coming of a messiah. When he came, very few recognized Jesus as the savior of the world. Mary was one of the notable exceptions. There is “a time to give birth, and a time to die” (2a). When the Archangel Gabriel asked for Mary’s cooperation, she said yes. She was ready to become a mother and to give birth. Zechariah was a very holy man, the Archangel Gabriel came to him as well, but he did not believe. Something had to die, in order for him to be ready. He lost his voice. Nine months later with the birth of his son, John the Baptist, he regained his voice.

There is “a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant” (2b). In the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat (Mt 13:24-43). The Word of God is like a seed, it should be planted all the time. We know that the enemy comes and sews weeds. Only at harvest time when the plants bear fruit will the weeds be pulled, bundled, and burned. We can learn a thing or two from God. We should be patient with others. And we should leave it to God to judge them. We may not always be able to distinguish between the good and the bad. Only Jesus is the just judge.

There is “a time to kill, and a time to heal” (Eccl 3a). Think of a person with cancer. Radiation is necessary to kill a cancer, but it often destroys much that is good. There is an extended period of time necessary for healing. Or think of a war. To kill in self-defense against an unjust aggressor is necessary to preserve life. But when a war is over, the hard work of healing begins.

There is “a time to tear down, and a time to build” (3b). In ancient times, the people decided to build the Tower of Babel. “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4). The Lord confused the speech of all. He tore down the tower and scattered the peoples. Fifty days after the Resurrection, Pentecost, was a time to build. “And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim... each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked ... how does each of us hear them in his own native language?” (Acts 2:4,6,7). The time to build the church had arrived.

There is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Eccl 3:4). When a person dies it is easy to cry, to mourn, and to grieve the loss. Forty days after Jesus died, he ascended into heaven. In some cultures, the forty days of crying is followed by a time of laughter and dancing. Only with our own passing, will our tears dry up. When the just judge determines we are worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven, we can laugh again with our loved ones who have preceded us in death. Meanwhile, those who mourn our loss, begin the grieving process with our passing from this life to the next.

There is “a time to love, and a time to hate” (8). Jesus teaches, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, (Mt 5:43-44). In Psalm 139, hatred of evil persons is assumed to be right. “Do I not hate, LORD, those who hate you? Those who rise against you, do I not loathe?” (21) Jesus asks us to put hatred aside and extend love to our enemies. As “His disciples, as children of God, [we] must imitate the example of [our heavenly] Father, who grants his gifts of sun and rain to both the good and the bad” (Ftnote to Mt 5:43-48).

There is “a time to seek, and a time to lose” (Eccl 3:6). Through prayer and patience, love and understanding, our vision can expand to see things through the eyes of God. Wrestling with

the simple question, “What would Jesus do?”, can help us to seek knowledge of human activity in God’s time and in God’s way. With the speed of the internet, we ask questions expecting instant answers. Biblical history shows us that sometimes the answers unfold a thousand or more years into the future. We will always be at a loss to understand if we think the answers are simple. The Prophet Isaiah puts it in perspective: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (55:9).

ⁱ From a footnote to the start of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes.