

* Among the books I have on the shelves there is one entitled “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Neil Postman. The author picked up an imaginative illustration for his book to grasp a point. The picture on the cover shows four headless people, parents and their children. The family is sitting on the couch in front of a television. It makes us believe that those people “lose their heads” while watching TV. Actually, everybody can lose their heads watching and hearing something spectacular as for example a natural disaster movie. The last one so called **2012** is a two and half hour long entertaining film with special effects in terms of destroying our planet. However, what is unusual here is that the spectators laugh out loud instead of crying out loud; unusual here is that people have stopped thinking instead of thinking. With this cover the author is making the statement that when watching TV, people exercise no critical thinking about what they are viewing and what they are hearing. To avoid error on this account we should not associate TV or the computer as the dragon, rather the problem is in the sinful human nature that allows itself to be deceived, frightened, exalted and entertained by the dragon.

* Now, as we settle on the source of the problem, let’s call on the Word of God for protection and guidance. Dear Lord, we know you as the source of all goodness. At the same time we realize that the destructive powers of this world wage constant war against our minds in order to separate us from Your ever living Word that is unshakable ground we are given to rest upon. Thereby we ask for your infinite mercy, protection and guidance. Help us to reflect upon our natural weakness with a sense of realities we are facing today. Let your Word teaches us today to live not according to the lust of men but according to your will and wisdom. By the power of your Holy Spirit sustain us as godly and fruitful disciples. Amen

* After praying, the faithful disciples may ask themselves, isn’t walking by faith the same as working by faith? I don’t see any difference in the meanings, rather I see our weakness in walking and working by faith on a regular basis. As employees, we may walk and work hard all day long but when night comes our weakened bodies long for a rest and we fall asleep. Contrary to this natural way of life, the faithful disciples are called to walk and work by faith day and night. I am sure the devil doesn’t like Christians who follow after this rule; but even the angels from heaven or all scholars on the earth will say that you need a rest walking by faith, let them go,(Gal 1:8).

* Recently we’ve heard frightening news. On February 28, at 3:43 a.m. the powerful earthquake, with a magnitude of 8.8, struck Chile’s coastline. The quake shook the earth when most people were in their beds. According to the last update the official death toll, was said to be about 540 people. We also heard frightening news from Haiti; it said 230,000 died after a 7.0 magnitude quake.

* These two terrible disasters were followed by the next calamity, FLOATING THROUGH THE SEA, If we would be able to look back one week at the European Atlantic coast, along France, Spain and Portugal, then we would have noticed many homes and roads under water. News was that the so called storm "Xynthia" ravaged the area on Sunday leaving more than one million households without power and at least 51 people dead. Now France is seeking emergency aid from the European Union. The next news came from India. It said on Thursday at least 63 people were killed in a stampede as the result of a massive rush for free food and clothes at a Hindu temple. Some people were crushed to death under the gate, while others were tripped and came under the feet of the rushing crowd as they tried to escape through a narrow corridor.

* Dear Friends, when these tragedies brought such great suffering to the poor what do you think the people from the thriving countries were asked for? You are right, they were asked for many things, except of one!!! In order to find that one let's take a journey in past. Just for a short time forget the recent tragedies in order to recall the old. As we read the Gospel lesson from (Luk 13:1-9), it mentioned two old tragedies; one was in connection with the execution of the worshipers from Galilee which was reported by some witnesses. Those worshipers were caught by the guardians and put to death according to Pilate's sanction. The text says that Pilate had mixed their blood with the blood of sheep and goats. Pilate may have suspected those people were involved in the insurrection against the Romans; the scholars said that was a reason. Another misfortune happened as a result of a local earthquake, or for some other reason. It said that a certain tower in Jerusalem fell upon Jews killing eighteen people - although this incident is not attested anywhere else in historical documents.

* Now imagine yourselves as ambassadors who go down from our age to the ancient time of Jesus. You appeared before the Lord at the same moment narrated by our text. So after one's report about the Galileans, you reported too. Dear Lord, you might say, could you believe it?, in one month and a half we've received two devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Chile; after that we've been floating through the sea in Western Europe, and above all of these was India's tragedy. In addition, you might say, these massive destructions caused much suffering and death. You had felt great pity on the people. In return, you expected the same compassion from Jesus as well as receiving positive response in answers to many prayers. However, Jesus' reaction was far away from what many felt and what they were hoped for. He said, *unless you repent, you too will all perish*, (Luk 13:5).

* Now since we have received Jesus' verdict, we can answer the question, when the tragedies brought so great suffering to the poor, what do you think the people from the thriving countries were asked for?

You are right, they were asked for many things, except for repentance!!! But we should not expect such things from the world, meanwhile Jesus always expects us to repent.

* Friends, let's see all the massive tragedies and devastations on our planet as a result of collective sins made by Haitians, Chileans, Hindus, Europeans and others including me and you. See yourself as a person who deserves punishment, suffering and has to repent. Our Lord knows each of us personally and He knows each of our faults and transgressions. But thank God that we are still alive, though we deserve punishment and everlasting death. For it is written, *unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, (Mat 5:20), you too will all perish, (Luk 13:5)*. The Word asks us to abide with repentant Spirit, flee from sinful desires, look for righteousness, be awake from apathy for help, and to walk and work by faith day and night.

* Friends, the lesson for today is clear and says that it is necessary to walk the narrow way with a penitential spirit; the lesson says nobody deserves everlasting life but punishment! If we are saved, we are saved by grace alone exclusively by God's mercy on the account of Jesus' merits!!! But it doesn't mean that we may conduct a sinful life.

* Finally, let's say the word in conclusion. In order to escape company with the beheaded family from Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death," we have to follow Jesus along the narrow Christian path. Saying metaphorically, walking by this way and not wide path of the lost, we will find many beautiful flowers, living waters; peaceful animals and birds because the narrow way excludes dragons and endless amusements; even earthquakes and tsunamis will not harm you to death after death.

Beloved, grace, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit belong to us, walk by way of life.

Amen.