

Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29:31; Mark 1:14-20

The story of Prophet Jonah, his mission in Nineveh, and the repentance of the people of Nineveh was a prophecy to the people of Israel when they returned from the Babylonian captivity. It was an example of the type of repentance that God required of the people of Israel. God used a non-Jewish people as an example for the Israelites. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, an unfriendly country to Israel. This seems to give an insight as to why Jonah resisted God's call to go to Nineveh to prophecy to them. However, he was forced to go by the means of the fish that swallowed him and dropped him off the coast of Nineveh. And when the people of Nineveh repented and God cancelled the threat of destroying them, Jonah was angry. It appears that Jonah wanted to see the enemies of Israel destroyed. He did not understand God's plan. Surely, God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither his ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Like Jonah, sometimes, we resist God's will and prefer our own will. Later, Jesus made reference to the story of Jonah and the Ninevites while denouncing the Jews, "At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here" (Matthew 12:41).

In the first reading Jonah announced to the people of Nineveh, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed." The reading continues, "When the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out." A way of applying the message of this reading is, there are people who must change their way of life or they ruin themselves. For such people, the change is necessary immediately or they are ruined. St. Paul warns in the second reading, "I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out." The first reading shows us how great God's mercy is. God forgave the people of Nineveh as soon as they believed in him and turned from their evil way. In the same way, God erases our sinful past when we repent, believe in him, and turn to him. God rescues us from the bondage of our ugly past as soon as we believe in him, turn to him and surrender.

St. Paul warns in the second reading, "From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully." This warning to the Corinthians was because at that time followers of Christ thought that the second coming of Christ was imminent. St. Paul taught the Corinthians that since "the time is running out" and "the world in its present form is passing away," nothing else should matter to anyone except "adherence to the Lord without distraction" (1 Corinthians 7:35).

This reading speaks to us in a special way. Each person's world is passing away. It may be sooner or later. Since no one is sure, we are warned to prepare to meet our God any time he calls us. Jesus says in the Gospel, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." This is a reality that poverty, riches, or any condition must not distract us.

The Gospel of today is St. Mark's account of the call of Simon, Andrew, James and John. These men were fishermen. When Jesus called them, they left everything and followed him. Jesus says, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). We, therefore, pray that more men and women may "abandon their nets," "their father Zebedee in the boat along with hired men" and become "fishers of men and women."

Finally, in the same manner, we are all invited to detach ourselves from the things that may become obstacles to answering God's call and doing God's will.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP