

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (January 21st, 2018)

O Lord, give me the grace to change my life, to return to You with all my heart. Restore me to Yourself.

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

1The word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying: This verse actually reads “The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time...” The first time Jonah ran away and God had to send a whale to haul him back! Who could blame Jonah for refusing to go to a powerful enemy and threaten him with divine retribution if he didn’t repent? Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were all reluctant or felt unworthy but Jonah *disobeyed*.

2“Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you.” Nineveh was a giant city, the royal residence of Assyria. The people were gentiles and enemies of the Israelites. Their trade route to Egypt ran right through Israel and they regularly swept down in search of conquest.

3So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord’s bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. We too are called to preach God’s message no matter how unpopular it is.

4Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day’s walk announcing, “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” Jonah is a prophet and yet the only prophecy he utters is the threatened destruction of Nineveh within forty days, which was not fulfilled. Yet this book, hardly more than a parable in length, is referred to 2 times by our Lord Jesus Christ!

5when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. What a preacher! Only one-third of the way into his mission and the people responded fully to his call to conversion! Let us be reminded here that the Church encourages us to fast as a form of penance even though it is only required on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday for those between the ages of 21 and 60. Since we are no longer required to go without meat on Fridays, we can now *choose our penance* every Friday of the year in memory of the death of the Lord. CCC 1438 says that lent and *each Friday* are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as *fasting* and almsgiving and fraternal sharing. In Pope Paul VI’s constitution “Paenitemini, 1966” it states specifically that every Friday calls for some act of penance when abstinence from meat is not observed. CCC 2043 explains that fasting and abstinence help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart. Jesus himself gives us the example of fasting for 40 days in preparation for his public ministry.

10When 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. Repentance and prayer change things!

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

29I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, Paul could be speaking to us for the Lord may come at any moment and we must live in prayer and watchfulness awaiting his return. While the Kingdom of God has been coming since the Last Supper and, in the Eucharist, it is in our midst, it will come in glory when Christ hands it over to his Father. We pray for this in the second petition of the Our Father: “Thy

kingdom come.” The Christian must be detached from the world that is passing away. Even the married must fulfill their duties without having their hearts attached to the world.

30those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning,
31those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

While Paul seems to be referring to an imminent return of the Lord at his second coming, he may also have been referring to the passing of the old world that was ordered by the Law of Sinai, and the coming of a new world ordered by the New Law in Christ which was taking over. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70A.D., the Christian center was definitely in Rome. The Lord’s resurrection and Pentecost ushered in the last days of salvation history and we are absolutely closer to the return of the Lord every day of our lives.

Mark 1:14-20

Stephen K. Ray points out that Peter and Andrew are fishing when Jesus calls them, whereas James and John are mending nets and this seems to be reflective of how they served the Church: the first two brought people to Jesus and into the Church as fishers of men; the second two mended nets, and their apostolate emphasized caring for, mending, and edifying the Church.

14After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: The arrest of John was a pivotal event turning the focus of Jesus’ ministry to Galilee. Prior to this, Jesus had an earlier ministry in Judea that overlapped with John’s. John 3:26 tells how John the Baptist’s disciples went to him and said, “Rabbi, the man who was with you across the Jordan—the one about whom you have been testifying—is baptizing now, and everyone is flocking to him.”

15“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” The time of prophesying and prefiguring the coming of the Messiah is over, for Jesus fulfills all that has been promised. “The kingdom of God is at hand.” This means that the kingdom of God’s sovereign rule over all nations through Jesus is at hand. David’s rightful heir is in their midst. This preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God with its call to conversion and forgiveness of sins for all who draw near to him in humble trust is also the new Third Luminous Mystery of the rosary. This call to repent (metanoia in Greek) literally means a “change of mind.” The word is used 22 times in the New Testament for a conversion of one’s entire life to the Lord. It involves a twofold movement of the heart: turning away from sin and turning toward God. This entails genuine contrition for past failings and a firm resolve to avoid them in the future. While this call to conversion is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel and for whom faith in the Gospel and Baptism are the way in which they can renounce evil and gain salvation (CCC 1427), the Catechism also speaks of the *second conversion* (CCC 1428) which applies to ALL of us who are at once holy and yet, always in need of purification, which calls us to follow constantly the path of penance and renewal. St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, “there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance.”

16As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. “As he passed by” would suggest a casual encounter but whenever this phrase is used about Jesus in the Gospels, it refers to the appearance or manifestation of his divine nature. Here it shows forth Jesus’ Messianic power to create disciples. The first disciples responded to Jesus immediately. Christ chose men of modest education to demonstrate to the world that the wisdom of the gospel stems directly from God and not the ingenuity of man.

17 Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Note that Jesus came to them while they were doing their normal, daily work.

18 Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.

19 He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. The writer of this gospel, Mark, combines incidents so as to make the three privileged disciples the first to be called. Keep in mind that Salome, the mother of James and John was the sister or half-sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This calling took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Zebedee are thought to have been fishing partners.

20 So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him. Such an abrupt break with family and livelihood was extraordinary then as now. Mark’s primary purpose in giving us the impression that Peter and Andrew left behind their livelihood and James and John severed family ties is to show that discipleship entails renunciation of possessions and family ties. “The hired servants” suggests that the fishing enterprise of Zebedee and his sons was prosperous.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from “The Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray, “Catholic Source Book” edited by Rev. Peter Klein, “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark,” the Commentary Notes of Tim Grey, “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” “The Twelve” by C. Bernard Ruffin.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who originally compiled these commentaries.