

Fr James' homily for The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021

First Reading: Jonah 3:1-5 and 10
Second Reading: First Letter to the Corinthians: 7:29-31
Gospel: Mark 1:14-20



There seems to be a lot of fish in the background of the scriptures for Mass today!

First we hear from the prophet Jonah, whose encounter with a big fish needs no introduction! If you're not immediately familiar with the story, then pick up your bible and read - that's good advice in this continuing "Year of the Word" and on this "Sunday of the Word of God". Also, Jonah is quite a short book, so no excuse.

Our reading today starts immediately after the big fish, or whale, has made his exit, having delivered Jonah to land. (*For a great summary of the point of Jonah, Google the video clip of the Sermon on Jonah from the film of Moby Dick, and watch Orson Welles give a great performance*). Once again Jonah hears the voice of God call him to go on mission and preach repentance to the great city of Nineveh. See how the threads of scripture run all the way through it as Jesus starts his ministry with the same call to repentance, or conversion of life. Amazingly Jonah's preaching is very very successful despite all the odds stacked against him...and that's where we leave the story today. If you read on in your own time there are a few more twists to the story to come, although they all serve the same purpose.

What's this all about? Perhaps it is about the need to single out the voice of God from all the other voices that we hear...and to be realistic about the reluctance we have and the opposition we face when we then seek to follow that voice.

In a way that is quite comic Jonah had been told at the start to go East, by way of land. What did he do? The opposite: he went West, by way of the sea!! That brought all the trouble, and the fish too. In the Gospel of Mark today, maybe we can see a bit of the same. What will it take for Simon and Andrew to follow the voice of Jesus -i.e. the voice of God. In John's telling of this, which was the Gospel last Sunday, the two brothers are indeed attracted to listening to Jesus, but they perhaps didn't know what to do and carried on the day job - fishing! So Jesus has to come and find them again and be a little less subtle: "follow me" he says, and they will be catch a different sort of fish.

It is difficult for us to respond to God's call to us, for inevitably that call is to repentance and conversion of life and to what we are reluctant to do. (The sermon in "Moby Dick" that I mention above puts it brilliantly saying that we find obeying God

hard because it means we have to disobey ourselves, and we don't like doing that! When we are wrestling with this, the prayer of Jonah in Chapter 2 of the book is very useful).

Nevertheless this is what we must do. God is calling us to preach to a desolate society and a mixed up world. Our instinct is probably to run the other way. God, however, puts his trust in us and patiently, persistently calls, as he does to Simon and Andrew. What this requires of us, in re-ordering our lives, may seem trivial in the big scheme of things, but it is gold dust to God's purposes. Who do you trust? Whose voice are you seeking? Don't be afraid of making hard decisions, for God is faithful and supplies his grace.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.