

Homily for Third Sunday of the Year – B

Readings Jonah 3: 1-5,10; Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1: 14-20



Fr Michael says:

Repent and Believe the Good News

The driving force behind Jesus' mission is the call for repentance and renewal, Jonah calls the people of Nineveh, who respond at once. The call should enable us to pick and choose as to our priorities and what is important in fulfilling this mission: our destiny is the ultimate vision we need to stimulate us. Jesus affirms this in His calling His first disciples to share in it with Him and they do so at once! Mark asks us a basic question in his Gospel: "who is Jesus Christ for you?" He presents the preaching and miracles of Jesus in the first part of it, to help us begin to respond. Jonah shows us the mercy and forgiveness of God as the result of his words.

Jesus' call is addressed to us all, good or bad. Surprisingly He had more trouble with the good people, because they did not see the need for conversion – many of us will remember how difficult it can be to get those who are ill to go to the doctor at times – and how much worse it is if someone is convinced they are fine! To be able to respond to the call, we need a sense of dissatisfaction with ourselves, a longing for something better – our conversion experience starts when we realise we are not the person we should and can be! This demands openness, honesty, humility and above all – courage to end the self-deception and confront a painful reality. The courage we need to admit we are wrong, ask forgiveness and decide to change, something which can be difficult if we are set in our ways. They can see how things can be better, but this will be challenging, it demands effort and perseverance, progress can be slow and hard. Transformation is essential for us to attain this aim.

Repentance can be seen as harsh and negative, as if it were only feeling guilty and doing penance for doing wrong things. On the contrary it is something positive, seeing things are not right in us, but we can also see new potential in ourselves, seeing a new vision, new direction, with worthwhile goals, values, leading to a new life. Repentance can be exciting and always leads to joy! The Christian life is a continuous process of conversion. John Henry Newman can be paraphrased: "To change is good, to change often makes saints!"

The Good News is that the Kingdom of God has come, God's promises are fulfilled, His blessings abundant, He establishes a new order of things. Forgiveness is available – recovery is possible! God's love is unconditional and is given through Jesus. All we need to do is recognise our need, seek His help with humility and sincerity. Unless we do this, we cannot hear the Good News!



Fr Tom says:

Aren't there some wonderful characters in the Old Testament, Jonah being one of them? Jonah, the reluctant hero! In spite of himself he becomes the instrument of salvation for the lost people of Nineveh. Nineveh was one of the oldest and, for 50 years, the largest city of the world, hence, the significance of its conversion, especially because it was not a Jewish town and they worshiped other gods. The story reveals that God's mercy is open to all, believer and non-believer alike.

This week, however, the focus is on being called by God, by Jesus, and our response to that call. So what can we learn?

The Jonah story suggests that God will use us to fulfil his will despite our reluctance or our lack of response but it also suggests that if we enter into situations that are challengingly difficult, that seem hopeless, even apparently impossible, that we dislike, all that is needed is our presence for God to work his wonders, particularly his healing forgiveness. It cannot be said too often, that God has always worked out his plan of our salvation, of the salvation of the whole world, with our cooperation, however reluctant or hesitant that cooperation may be (viz. Zechariah and the birth of John the Baptist; Joseph and the birth of Jesus).

On the other hand the calling of the first disciples by Jesus shows a reckless response to that call. These first disciples drop everything without even knowing what was going to happen. A further reading of Mark's Gospel will show that these disciples, the apostles, not only did not understand what Jesus was asking of them but kept getting it wrong. Despite all this they persevered and they came back even despite their betrayal of friendship at his arrest. Even more encouraging is the fact that Jesus never gives up on them and perseveres with them. Even if we turn away or avoid doing what God asks, even despite all our hesitations, misunderstandings and getting things wrong, God never gives up on us, even if we are at times like Jonah. All we have to do is persevere like the apostles. If we only put ourselves into those apparently impossible places, God will do the rest. The Jonah story also reminds us that the Good News is for everyone and that the apparently most hostile of people are open to conversion. Everything is possible with God.

One commentator on the Jonah passage said that God seems to go back on his word. "40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed!" She explains that, in fact, this is what happens. The Godless Nineveh before their act of repentance has been replaced by a new and redeemed Nineveh that lives by God's principles. So let us never underestimate the power and therefore the importance of repentance - a city of evil becomes a city of life. What was true then is possible today.

Let Paul have the last word. The world as we know it is passing away as we are only too aware. We have been called urgently to work in the name of Jesus and the Good News so that it is replaced by a world that lives in God's way. Our presence and our response to God's call is imperative and as Paul says '*Urgent*', and this will always require that we repent (change our ways, however reluctantly), and take the message of life that we have been freely given by Jesus to enable others to share in this life - a life that promises trust and hope and greater communion.

"The Lord is good and upright. He shows the path to those who stray, he guides the humble in the right path, he teaches his way to the poor." (Ps 24:9)