

“Someone Must Care”

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 24, 2021

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This is a fruitful story I would like to share with you from the author Fr. Ralph A. DiOrio in his book, *Called to Heal*. This story was told by a social worker:

“A juvenile court referred a teenager’s case to a Good Shepherd Home. Just seventeen, the teenager of our story wasn’t really a bad girl – so the authorities said – but just a good girl that tried to cover the deep scars in her heart with rebellion, retaliation – a common reaction. Her home life had been unhappy; her parents didn’t even notice that she existed. She didn’t belong; no one really wanted her.

After a few months in the Good Shepherd Home, the girl was granted a visit with her family. She chatted freely with the social worker who accompanied her for the visit. How eagerly she longed to see her mother again! How she was filled with happiness at the thought of meeting her again. Butterflies gurgled through her stomach with the excitement of the anticipated reunion.

They parked at the curb, walked to the front door with that bounce of anticipation, and pressed the bell. The mother answered the door. She didn’t laugh or cry, neither did she open her arms. She was not surprised or happy. But she did manage to speak: “It’s you... Well, get out. I never want to see you again.”

It was a sad, silent ride back to the home. A human person had been rejected at a time when she needed response. A young heart had been stabbed, scarred, and twisted again. The girl must learn the hard lesson that someone does care, even if those who really should, do not.”

Love, concern, and thoughtfulness will always, with God’s grace, find their expression. Someone must care. God therefore cares about the people of Ninevah. God does not want the death or the misery of sinners, but that they be converted and live. The announcement of God’s punishment reveals the gravity of human sins. It aims at arousing consciousness of the tragedy of obstinacy in evil as might have been the case of the Ninevites. It is an expression of the Divine Mercy that does not resign itself to letting the sinners go blindly to their doom. God is always ready to intervene in order to stop the process to damnation that began with obstinacy in evil. To repent of evil, to change our mind, is not, in God’s eyes, to lose face; on the contrary, it reveals God’s true nature and His power to master His righteous anger.

The conversion of the inhabitants of Ninevah is exemplary because it is radical and general. It is more admirable as it involves pagans who listened to a stranger’s words. Ninevah was an ancient Assyrian city of Upper Mesopotamia, located on the outskirts of Mosul in modern-day northern Iraq. It was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River.

Some Jews, at the time, were quite nationalistic, and filled with a smug sense of their superiority over all other nations. Like Jonah, they wished God would destroy the nations they perceived as enemies. Bigotry creates the gaping chasm between God’s universal vision and the often myopic and selective insight of people, including us who call ourselves Christians and belong to the family of God. Bigotry decides that certain people are better than others and worthier of attention, while it writes off others as valueless and not worth the effort. Bigotry is such an ugly word that while we readily recognize it in others, few of us are willing to consider it as a possible personal flaw. Perhaps if we were to ask ourselves a few pointed questions, we would find the Jonah in us. For Jonah, the Ninevites were terrible people, doing terrible things and therefore they

would be destroyed by God's wrath. Contrary to Jonah's expectations, the pagans, the others, believed in God and renounced their evil behavior. Jonah had become an arrogant, bigoted, narrow-minded prophet in the midst of God's sovereign mercy and compassion for all people. But he finally realized that God's love is not limited. God's forgiveness is not to be contained. Here is our poor, probably pathetic Jonah, the Prophet.

Jonah is not an example of behavior, a model of a compassionate prophet to be emulated. Rather, he is an angry, judgmental, small-minded man who bitterly opposes God's compassion and mercy on those who do not follow the rules. He is a kind of proto-fundamentalist. He exhibits a tendency of ethnic intolerance.

There is no doubt that sometimes it is right to be angry. Anger at an injustice is a sign of an active moral conscience. Getting mad when something unfair happens to people is a good sign. It can be the energy that gets us to move toward making justice an essential component of human life and towards righting the wrong. Anger can be a motivation for action for a positive change for the marginalized.

But our Jonah is mad because the Ninevites have been spared. The compassion, the mercy of God is greater than Jonah's petty need for revenge and retribution. Jonah is angry because he did not get what he wanted – God smiting the people Jonah despised so much as to attempt to run away from prophesying against their evil ways.

Sometimes we do not want reconciliation or resolution. We want to triumph in victory over another. We can be revengeful or spiteful and in so doing perpetuate a conflict, continue a difference we have with another. Maybe you have known people like Jonah who refuse to give up their resentments, refuse to let go of a justified anger or a grudge, who settle with bitterness at the perceived or actual wrongdoings of others. But remember that God is concerned with all human beings and offers His pardon to all – to the people of today's Ninevah as to those of yesterday's.

It is for this Good News of God's mercy and compassion that St. Paul and St. Mark remind us of the time of fulfillment – that the Kingdom is at hand. That time is a call to repentance and belief in the Gospel. It is a time to live in total freedom and detachment because nothing that we have, whether things or personal attachment, is permanent, and everything can disappear at a moment's notice. Whether life is very good or very bad, nothing lasts except the fundamental values or truth, love, freedom, and justice. These fundamental values exist in our abandonment of our fishing nets, our skills at fishing, and response to the Lord's call to follow Him so He will make us fishers of men. Fishing for people means bringing people to justice by dragging them out of their hiding places and setting them before the judge – for our case the compassionate and merciful Judge, who is God.

We are the fish and what God promises us who are dragged out of the water in the nets to die, like a fish dies outside the water, is a Resurrection, a new life, a new family, a new future all under the mercy of God. God is relentless in calling us back to Himself, even when we stray away from Him. Let us appreciate our call and be thankful to God for His divine grace of calling to share in His redemptive work of compassion and mercy in every little corner of our lives. Let us be shining lights in the world as Christ was and make personal efforts to bring others to the truth and the light, so that they may rejoice with us in the mystical Body of Christ.