

3B 2021 SML
JON 3:1-5,10; MK 1:14-20

Do you know why Jonah did not want to go to Ninevah? The answer to that question holds the key if we are going to understand what it is the scriptures are saying not only about what happened long ago, but what God is asking now, by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, and that is to live a prophetic life.

What most of us know about the story of Jonah is Jonah is the man who spent three days in the belly of a whale. So let's flesh out Jonah's story a bit more. Jonah was a man who lived in Israel. God called him to go to Ninevah, which is roughly Iraq. Jonah got in a boat and headed for Spain, in the wrong direction. So while he was in the boat running away from Ninevah, a big storm came, and he made known to the people on the boat why the storm has happened. It was because he was not doing the will of God. God wanted him to go to Ninevah and he was heading for Spain. Jonah says throw me overboard and you'll be fine and so they do, asking God's forgiveness before they do. Jonah is swallowed by a big fish. The big fish spits him back up on the land and off he goes to

Ninevah and what commences is the story I just read. We missed the first part. And we miss the last part.

We just get the middle part. So Jonah goes to Ninevah, sent by God, walking through the city, saying, “Forty days more, and Ninevah will be destroyed.” Seems kind of harsh. What kind of cruel, vindictive God says, “Change, or I’m going to destroy you?” But then the unexpected happens. This city, which takes three days to walk through, after just one day of listening to Jonah and the word of God, repented. They changed. They said they were sorry. And God does not do what He had threatened to do to them.

And then comes the next line, which is the verse after the first reading ended, which we didn’t hear this morning, which is the answer why Jonah did not want to go to Ninevah. Most of us think Jonah didn’t go to Ninevah because:

- ✓ he was afraid
- ✓ didn’t want to be laughed at,
- ✓ didn’t want to walk through the city with a sign reading “Forty days more and Ninevah will be destroyed,” or
- ✓ all the people are going to mock and taunt me.

But that’s not why Jonah did not go to Ninevah.

Here's why Jonah says he did not go to Ninevah. This is after the people repented.

But this (the people repenting) was greatly displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry . . . Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the Lord asked, "Have you reason to be angry?"

Why didn't Jonah go to Ninevah the first time? Because he did not want the Ninevites to repent. He did not want them to be spared. He wanted them to die. But God didn't want them to die. God loves the world. John's Gospel: God so loved the world. That's why He made the world, and so He sent Jonah to tell the Ninevites:

- ✓ to repent,
- ✓ to change the way they think,
- ✓ to stop sinning,

because to sin is not merely the breaking of some arbitrary law, or rules or regulations. God hates sin for one reason, only one. It is bad for you and for me. Because God loves you, He says don't do that. Not because if you do, I'm going to get so angry I'm going to punish you. But because if you do

- ✓ it will hurt,
- ✓ it will be bad for you,
- ✓ bad for others,

- ✓ bad for the country in which you live.

And so he sent Jonah to Ninevah to tell them that.

Another prophet who shows up fleetingly in the gospel did something similar – John the Baptist. He just got arrested for speaking, for talking to King Herod, saying what you are doing is harmful. He was committing adultery. He was married to another man's wife. Still worse, he was married to his brother's wife. So John went to Herod, not because he was a political power and wanted to throw some dirt on Herod to get him out of office. John went to Herod because God loves Herod. And he said to Herod what you are doing is harmful:

- ✓ it's harmful to you
- ✓ it's harmful to the woman with whom you are committing adultery
- ✓ it's harmful to her husband
- ✓ who happens to be your brother, and
- ✓ it's harmful to the country that you are leading.

Herod didn't like that so he beheaded John.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John, not to regulate a bunch of rules, laws and obligations to restrict people's freedom, but to catch them, to snatch them out of the mentality of the world, which is wrong on so many levels,

and to bring them into the mentality of God, who is a God who wants us to thrive. So God the Father so loved the world He sent His Son, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. And to be saved, the world has to repent. It has to acknowledge that “I do not think the way I should on everything.” So God has called you, and called me, just like he called Jonah, like he called John the Baptist, and just like Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John, to be prophets.

Everybody here is a prophet. Everybody here is a prophet. And the task of a prophet is to speak for of God, and nine times out of ten, that’s speaking something the world does not want to hear. But in order to do that:

- ✓ we have to know what God thinks,
- ✓ we have to have courage, and above all,
- ✓ we have to have charity.

And so in our day and age, the Lord is asking us to speak to those issues which are most pressing, which is why the Church speaks on abortion, as Friday was the 48th anniversary of legalized abortions.

She speaks frankly on abortion out of love for the world. Because abortion is harmful:

- ✓ not only to the child who dies,

- ✓ but to the mother,
- ✓ to the father,
- ✓ to the doctors and nurses involved,
- ✓ to the country who thinks that it's moral to kill children.

Because think about it, after a mother has an abortion, she is still a mother. The mother is the mother of a baby who died. And she killed the baby, and that's hard to live with, one of many reasons why abortion is an intrinsic evil, meaning always morally wrong. My brother lost his three year old in a car accident. No one would agree that because little Geoffrey died does not mean my brother is no longer a father.

- ✓ It's why the Church teaches as she does about marriage, not because she is intolerant.
- ✓ It's why the Church teaches as she does about embryonic stem cell research. Can't create life to kill it.
- ✓ It's why the Church speaks as she does about human trafficking.

This is why the Church speaks, the Church of course, being, us. This is what God expects, asks and begs of us, to know what God thinks. It's not all that hard to figure out. We have a great gift in the Catechism. If we don't understand or know what the Church teaches, it's pretty easy to read, and it's helpful to us to speak on God's behalf.

We don't need to know just what the Church teaches. We need boldness and courage to do it. But more than anything, we need what Jonah didn't have. Jonah didn't have love. Jonah wanted a ghetto. Jonah wanted a bunch of people who thought the same way. And everybody else, they can die. God doesn't want that. God wants everybody to live, and to come to repentance.

So let's ask God today, especially as we receive Holy Communion, not just to give us much needed courage to speak the truth, but more than anything, to fill us with His love. It's love that moves a Mom or a Dad to speak to a daughter, about something that she's doing that isn't right. It's love that should move anybody in authority to address an issue that needs to be addressed. It's love that moves the Lord to send His Son. Pray for big hearts, afire with God's charity, so that we can speak as the prophets God has called us to be. Because everybody here is a prophet.