• Did a whale really swallow Jonah? It is physically impossible, so how can this be true?

I think at times we can lost in the forest because we get too focused on the trees. The story of Jonah is not really about whether or not he got swallowed by a whale, or actually big fish. The line in the Book of Jonah said, “But the LORD sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he remained in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” First, let us be honest, if God wanted Jonah to be swallowed by a whale and survive, he could do just that, for all things are possible for God. But, the story of Jonah is a powerful story of God’s mercy and at times our intransigence. It is about how we have a part to play in God’s plan on salvation for others and our unwillingness to do that. It is about God’s desire to seek conversion in all people’s lives and our desire rather to have them punished. It is about how we can get so focused on our grievance towards others that we want them punished. It is about recognizing God’s plan and wanting nothing to do with it. It is about the value and sacredness of all human life and how dear all human life is to God. It is about the power of God’s call and its ability to bring repentance and conversion. It is about how we are called to be God’s instrument and our need to embrace God’s call especially when it goes against everything we believe, and desire should happen.

Jonah was called by the Lord to bring a message to the people of the city of Nineveh, the capital of the hated Assyrians. The Assyrians had tormented the people of Israel for years and made their lives miserable. God wanted to send Jonah to the is people to warn them of their coming destruction. Jonah wanted no part of this for he realized if the people heeded his word and changed that God would be merciful and relent on punishing them. Jonah wanted them punished and, so he tried to run away. He got on a boat which experienced a horrific storm. To quiet the storm, Jonah had the sailors through him overboard and the whale/big fish swallowed for three days and three nights. (This is seen as synonymous with Jesus in the tomb) When Jonah returns to land, he proceeds to Nineveh proclaims his message and before he even reaches the entire city the people from the king all the way done immediately repent and our spared. “But this greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I fled at first toward Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, repenting of punishment.”

The story is about God’s mercy and compassion being intended for all people. It is about recognizing that God has care and concern for all people. Our sense of justice is not God’s sense. He judges differently than we do. And we are called to recognize the inherent dignity and sanctity of all life for all life comes from the living God.