

## **1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of Lent 2021**

### **Jonah 3:1-10**

*The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you."*

*So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD's bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it.*

*Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed," when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.*

*When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.*

*Then he had this proclaimed throughout Nineveh, by decree of the king and his nobles: "Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep, shall taste anything; they shall not eat, nor shall they drink water.*

*Man and beast shall be covered with sackcloth and call loudly to God; every man shall turn from his evil way and from the violence he has in hand.*

*Who knows, God may relent and forgive, and withhold his blazing wrath, so that we shall not perish." When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.*

### **Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19**

*Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt  
and of my sin cleanse me.*

*A clean heart create for me, O God,  
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.  
Cast me not out from your presence,  
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.*

*For you are not pleased with sacrifices;  
should I offer a burnt offering, you would not accept it.*

*My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;  
a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.*

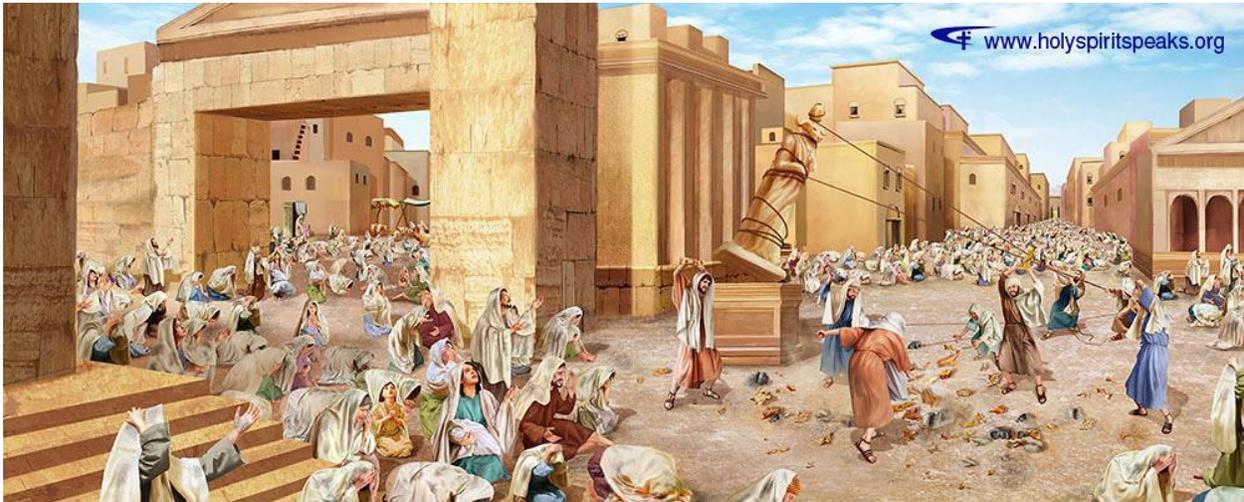
### **Luke 11:29-32**

*While still more people gathered in the crowd, Jesus said to them, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah.*

*Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.*

*At the judgment the queen of the south will rise with the men of this generation and she will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and there is something greater than Solomon here.*

*At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here.*



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*Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.*

So says Jesus as he preaches on his journey towards Jerusalem. The crowds following him have increased and so have their demands. At Capernaum and since then, Jesus had been travelling, preaching and healing. And yet this “evil generation” demands a sign.

From my street background, I’d say, “You want a sign? You want a sign?! I’ll give you sign: the sign of Jonah!”

In this, and through Jonah, Jesus is connecting his mission to that of the prophets.

Centuries before, our Hebrew prophet, Jonah, had been called by God to go to Nineveh, the accursed capital of Assyria. The Assyrian empire had devastated Israel in the most brutal and cruel manner. Yet the Ninevites were to be warned of their impending doom for their unrelenting evil.

Frankly, Jonah would’ve really preferred that God just wipe them out and so he took off in the other direction. That ended up with Jonah going to sea, being tossed overboard by the crew in a storm only to be “rescued” through the belly of a great fish (for 3 days).

After being spewed up onto shore, Jonah more readily responded to God’s call, and the correct direction.

So, Jonah went to Nineveh and proclaimed in the streets that they would all be destroyed. It would take 3 days to traverse the great city and Jonah just wanted to finish up this duty, get on his way, and let God destroy the city—fine by him.

But something incredible happened. The Ninevites believed that Jonah was from God. They believed God's threat to destroy them. They confessed their abominations, put on sackcloth and ashes and in humble repentance prayed for undeserved mercy. The king joined in with a royal proclamation for fasting by the entire community, including the animals. ALL were to turn from their evil ways. Their repentance was total and complete.

God was moved by their conversion and repented of his threat. He did not carry it out.

So, what is the sign of Jonah here that Jesus was identifying with?

John the Baptist, the cousin called to prepare the way of the Lord, preached a baptism of repentance, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt 3:2)

After John's arrest, Jesus proclaimed at the start of his ministry, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt 4:17)

The *sign* is the prophetic Word of God.

Beyond all expectations, the Ninevites responded.

Jesus did not have that same unequivocal response. Some dedicated their lives to Jesus and some gave their lives for Jesus. But there were far too many in the crowds who were attracted by his charismatic preaching and his miraculous healing. Too few took that as a sign to look at their own lives, to look deep in their own souls at their selfishness, at how they advanced themselves to the detriment of others.

There is a certain dying to the self that happens here when we respond to God's Word. It is only with God's grace that we could even hope to do so. It was God's movement in the Ninevites that empowered them to embrace abject humility and find life, not destruction.

We are so invited today. It would be impossible for us without God's movement. Through Jesus' total self-sacrifice for us on the cross, we are won for God. We are called to imitate Jesus' love for his Father and his neighbor, doing so with God's children in deed and through the sacraments.

Through the Word of God, you are called.

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