

### 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY IN OT—Year B—M02-D21-Y2021

01. *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the Good News.* In today's Gospel, Jesus begins His public ministry with this important message—a message that most of us are familiar with—a message **we've heard so many times, that (if you're like me), you start to tune it out after awhile.**
02. But this message is **as important, as meaningful, and as powerful now as it was then—the message that God is intervening in human history RIGHT NOW—and that we need to change our behaviour accordingly.**
03. And, in fact, all the readings today involved people who had to deliver a similar message. Noah was called **to deliver a message to the people of his time that God was going to intervene in history and cause a great flood to renew the face of the earth.**
04. And Peter was called to deliver a message to the people of HIS time—that **God HAS intervened in human history through His Son, Jesus Christ—to transform the world, and to bring about the salvation they were all waiting for.**
05. The difference with the Message that Jesus was delivering is that, unlike Noah and Peter, **Jesus is not simply the messenger—Jesus is the very Message itself.**
06. Because our salvation is not a thing, nor a place, **nor even an event per se — our salvation is a Person — the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity — the Person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, Who not only intervenes in history, He intervenes in OUR history—our very own personal history — bringing salvation to those who welcome Him — transforming the lives of all those who allow Him.**
07. So, when Jesus says: **the time is fulfilled—He means that the time is NOW — that God wants to intervene in our lives RIGHT NOW — that salvation is available to us RIGHT NOW — that God is sending**

**His Son to save us, not just 2000 years ago, but RIGHT NOW** — sending His Son AT THIS VERY MOMENT to be the salvation we so desperately need.

08. Because salvation is not **ONLY** some event in the distant future—available to us ONLY WHEN **we finally get our act together**—only when **we finally get certain sinful behaviours under control**—only when **we finally have more time to practice religious devotions**.
09. Salvation is available to us NOW—because the Person of Jesus Christ is **present, available, and accessible to us now** — to meet our need for salvation — to fulfill our desire **for joy, for peace, for purpose and meaning**.
10. And there IS no better time to welcome Him, and to receive this salvation than NOW. And **NOW** will always be the **BEST time to welcome Him and to receive all that He came to bring us—all that He has to offer us**.
11. And when Jesus says: *and the Kingdom of God has come near*—He means that **HE, Who is our salvation, has come among us and is now closer to us than our own skin**.
12. So, there is no more need to search **for joy and peace, purpose and meaning, OUTSIDE ourselves** — because in Christ, **ALL THESE are closer to us than our own skin**—for the Kingdom of God, **which has come near to us, resides in Jesus Himself**. In other words, Jesus not only brings us the Kingdom—**Jesus IS the Kingdom**.
13. For His Incarnation, His coming among us as one of us—means that Jesus is intimately united to each of us. Because, again, **our salvation is a Person** — a Divine Person who already lives within us — a Person Who is the Father's PERFECT ANSWER to **all our searching—all our pain—all our loneliness—all our brokenness**.
14. And when Jesus says: *repent*, He means that if we are searching for salvation in the pursuit of financial wealth and material possessions — in the pursuit of pleasure and popularity — in the pursuit of EARTHLY honour and glory — **in the promises of**

**technology and man-made solutions — that we are on the wrong path and that we need to change our behaviour accordingly— because these things, ULTIMATELY, cannot satisfy us, and will not bring us salvation.**

- 15. Because our salvation is not found with these things—our salvation is found in Jesus Christ Who ALONE is our joy and our peace, our purpose and our meaning.**
- 16. And when Jesus says: and believe the Good News — He means that He Himself IS the Good News—and that we should not only believe Him—we should believe IN Him. Because He has been sent by the Father to be the satisfaction of all our wants—the fulfillment of all our needs—the end to all our pursuits—the answer to all our questions. And He alone is the solution we seek—the comfort we need—the happiness we desire—and the love that we crave.**
- 17. And so, for all these reasons, Jesus is NOT ONLY the Messenger of the Good News—He IS the Good News! And just as THIS Good News changed the world—it can now change OUR world/our PERSONAL world as well — because Jesus is the only one Who can give answers to the questions we are asking — the only One Who can give meaning to our experiences, our history, our suffering — the only One Who can free us from the power of shame, guilt, and regret. Because the salvation Jesus offers is personal to EACH ONE OF US.**
- 18. For all of us have a unique set of experiences, of circumstances, of questions — and all of us have wounds that have not been healed—pain that has not been taken away—traumas from which we have not recovered—questions that have not been answered.**
- 19. And all of us have things BOTH in our past and present that we can't seem to make peace with — relationships that are fractured and broken — worries about the future, and anxieties about the present — things about our world (and our life) that we simply can't make sense of.**

20. But Jesus is the only One Who offers each of us a **CUSTOMIZED solution to ALL THESE**—a solution **which, in some sense, is unique to each one of us.**
21. This doesn't **necessarily** mean that Jesus is going to **solve all our problems—but it does mean that He will help us find peace in the midst of them.** Because the salvation Jesus offers us **doesn't free us from difficulties in this life—it gives us VICTORY OVER THEM—allowing us to rise above them—to live to the fullest in the midst of them.**
22. I think a big part of why we may struggle to believe this Good News is that many of us **don't really know what salvation is supposed to look like and feel like in this life.** And I speak from my own experience here—because even though **I believe that Jesus is our Saviour, and that He has come to bring us salvation not just in the future, but now** — even though I believe all this, there are some days **I don't feel very saved at all—that I still struggle with sin, with fear, with shame, and regret.**
23. Moreover, there are some days I fall into the trap of thinking that **salvation in this life, means being free from challenges and problems.**
24. But, **AGAIN,** the salvation Jesus brings to us **NOW** is not about being free from challenges in **THIS LIFE—it's about finding peace and joy in the midst of these challenges—making peace with our circumstances and not letting them prevent us from living life to the full.**
25. I heard a story a few weeks ago in the news that really demonstrates what I'm trying to say. It's about a father named **Derek Prue, who did something rather extraordinary for his 8-year-old son, who is ALSO named Derek.** It seems that Derek Jr., the son, had been born with a **rather large birth mark on his upper body that caused him a lot of shame and made him self-conscious.**

26. So, Derek Sr., his dad, decided **to get a tattoo on his OWN body to match the birth mark of his son**—in the hopes that his son would now see that he is not alone, and will be less self-conscious about his birth mark.
27. And so, Derek Sr. spent **30 painful hours under a tattoo needle just to comfort his son and to be WITH HIS SON in his shame**. In an interview the father said: *“I knew he was self-conscious, and that made me want just to show him he wasn’t the only one.”*
28. This is a great story for many reasons, but one of which is that **it’s a beautiful analogy of what Jesus does for us and the salvation He brings us**. In the story, the son **still had to live with his birthmark**—the birthmark wasn’t taken away from him — **but the act of sacrifice and love of his dad, FAR OUTWEIGHED the shame the son felt about the birthmark**—and helped him to make peace with it—by realizing that he is not alone in it.
29. So, in essence, even though the birth mark remained—its sting was significantly reduced by the act of love and sacrifice Derek’s father made.
30. In the same way, the salvation Jesus offers us in this life, **is not necessarily about taking away our problems—INSTEAD, it’s more about taking the sting OUT OF our problems by sharing in our wounds**—by helping us to carry our burdens—by comforting us in our pain and suffering—**and by being with us in our struggles, so that we are not alone in them**.
31. And so, on this, the 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, if you find yourself asking questions like: **how can I stop worrying about the future — how can I let go of the past — how can I make peace with my circumstances — what is the meaning of my suffering—the purpose of my life — how can I find joy in the midst of a pandemic?**
32. **The Good News is that there is an answer to these questions — a perfect answer**. Because God our Father has responded to these

questions in the **best possible way—giving us the most perfect Answer IMAGINABLE—**His only-begotten Son.

33. And only in Him do we find the answers to these questions—**because Jesus Himself IS the Answer—the Answer to all the important questions each of us is asking about our world, about our lives—EVEN about the meaning of this pandemic —** and it is only in drawing closer to Him do we find **the answers we are looking for—the salvation for which we yearn.**

34. So, as we begin this Holy Season of Lent—let us take the time to reflect on **where have we been searching for the salvation we so desperately need —** where have we REALLY been seeking the answers to the questions of our life—**the remedy to the yearning we feel—the relief from the burdens we carry—the healing of our hurts and wounds—the solution to the emptiness and pain within.**

35. Because if what we HAVE BEEN doing **ISN'T REALLY WORKING to remedy these—now is the time to do something different—to try something new.** Now is the time to draw closer **to Him Who alone IS our salvation —** to Him Who is closer to us than our own skin — **to Him Who already lives within us.** For He is about to intervene in history once again—in our PERSONAL history — offering us the salvation we so desperately need — saying to each and everyone us: ***The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the Good News. AMEN.***