

John the Baptist cried out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (Mk 1:3). He proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Many heard and believed and had their lives changed for the better. Others did not believe. After fulfilling his mission, John the Baptist was arrested, condemned to death, and beheaded.

Jesus followed a similar pattern. He proclaimed the gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). Jesus called people to a new way of life ... one of love, service, sacrifice and healing. Many heard and believed and had their lives transformed for the better. Others rejected that message. Today we hear how Jesus called his first disciples. After teaching them by word and example, Jesus was arrested, condemned to death, and crucified.

Jesus set the pattern for his apostles. He called them and they followed. He taught them and they learned. They too proclaimed, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” They cured the sick, raised the dead, cleansed lepers, as well as drove out demons. (Mt 10:7-8). After Jesus was crucified, died, and rose from the dead, he gave his apostles a new mission of building the church by going to the ends of the earth and proclaiming the good news. Aside from Judas who betrayed Jesus, the others followed the path set forth by Jesus. Most were arrested, condemned to death, and martyred. We know the beloved disciple was not killed but he served during a time of great persecution, a challenging time, as he called people to holiness amidst an age of persecution and martyrdom.

The pattern is set. The path for us to follow is clear. Time and again God calls forth men and women of courage to call people to a new way of life. God also calls the imperfect and flawed to carry forth his message.

Our first reading offers the story of a reluctant prophet. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the people of their wickedness and the consequences of embracing the dark side. Jonah rejected his mission, but God’s will cannot be so easily denied. After a near death experience, Jonah is resent and this time he delivers God’s powerful message. The Ninevites listen and they repent immediately. “All, from king to lowliest subject, humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Seeing their repentance, God does not carry out the punishment planned for them” (Intro to Jonah).

Jonah should be amazed at what has transpired. Instead, he is angry. He only wants God’s mercy to extend to Israel. God is concerned with everyone even the enemies of Israel. Jonah is “a disobedient, narrow-minded prophet who is angry at the outcome of the sole message he delivers” and still the Lord works through him (Intro to Jonah). In a nation that is so ideologically divided, is there not a lesson for us?

God is concerned with everyone even those we may vehemently disagree with. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. We must listen and learn from him to find a path forward. Today is the Word of God Sunday. Does it not make sense that the Lord can show us the way?

One of the final acts of the risen Lord before his Ascension was to appear to the disciples and open their minds to Sacred Scripture. Amid “their fear and bewilderment, he unveiled the meaning of the paschal mystery: that in accordance with the Father’s eternal plan he had to suffer and rise from the dead, in order to bring repentance and the forgiveness of sins” (Aperuit Illis #1). We gather each Sunday to hear the Word of God proclaimed. Imperfect like Jonah, a priest tries to explain how the Word of God applies to our lives.

“Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has

colored his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that each of us may find a richness in what he or she contemplates” (AI # 2, Saint Ephrem).

The living Word of God “never tires of speaking to his Bride, that she may grow in love and faithful witness” (AI #2). In addition to our communal hearing of the Word of God, we must also take Jesus home with us, into our hearts and minds to ponder his message for us that we may listen, learn, and see a path forward.

Be wary of being like Jonah and running in the opposite direction or being upset with the message of mercy that the Lord is trying to communicate through us. Rather, let us be heroic disciples proclaiming a message of repentance and forgiveness so that others may hear and believe and have their lives changed for the better. Let us proclaim “the Gospel in all its truth and power, in season and out of season, even when that teaching is inconvenient or when the Gospel’s truths run contrary to the directions of the wider society and culture” (Archbishop Jose Gomez).