

3rd Sunday (B)

In our readings today we hear about openness to God. An open heart is needed if we want to be able to hear God when He speaks to us, as we never know when that might be. The First Reading and Gospel show us that sometimes the Word of God comes to us unexpectedly.

In the First Reading we hear about Jonah's mission to Nineveh. This is the guy who was in the belly of the fish for three days. Our reading today picks up after, when he is no longer scared or timid about preaching to Nineveh. Nineveh is in a Gentile region, meaning they do not believe in the God of Israel. It was also located in Assyria, who destroyed the Northern Kingdom and brought the 10 tribes of Israel into exile. To these people Jonah was sent to, who told them to repent or, their city will be destroyed in 40 days.

How did they react to Jonah's message? They immediately believed him. They put on sackcloth, which was a sign of repentance, and fasted. They heard Jonah's message and believed in God. This is part of the wonder of what happened. Jonah's preaching caused a conversion of heart, which led to a change of religious belief. They went from their pagan gods to worship of the one true God.

I think they were fostering an openness of heart, which led to their souls being fertile soil to Jonah's word. Their hearts were receptive to what Jonah had to

say, and it bore fruit in their lives. This wasn't just a mere intellectual conversion. They changed their entire lives at the drop of a hat. Without that openness of heart, the Ninevites do not change their lives, and their city is destroyed. Were they expecting to radically change their lives when Jonah walked into town? No. I'm sure it was just a normal Tuesday for them when Jonah arrived. This openness was the necessary condition for them to hear Jonah's message and to do something about it.

The Gospel shows something similar happening, as we heard the call of two sets of brothers: Simon & Andrew, and James & John. Some think that these four were business partners in the fishing industry in Galilee, forming a sort of fishing company, as St. Mark tells us James and John left their father and their hired men to follow Jesus. This seems plausible to me, as they are seen fishing together many times in the Gospel, even after the Resurrection.

For them it was just another day at work: catching fish, getting paid, mending nets, and doing all the other usual things that you do if you're a fisherman. Then a curious man named Jesus shows up and their lives, and the entire world, are changed forever. He tells them to follow Him, and they drop everything and follow Him.

Now, if we piece together a chronology of the life of Jesus from all four Gospels, it appears that this was not the first time these four encountered Jesus,

even though in St. Mark's accounting it is. This still doesn't help to explain their reaction. Even if this was the closest friendship in the history of friendships it does not make their reaction reasonable. Put yourself in their place. Imagine someone comes up to you and says, "Stop what you're doing. Leave your job and your family and come with me." You would completely dismiss this and continue on with your life.

But this is precisely what happened that day. They were not expecting anything out of the ordinary. They were not looking for a career change. They weren't going to night classes in basket weaving to get a piece of that expanding market. God broke into their lives in the person of Jesus and offered them a simple invitation with transformative consequences. If they say "yes" they will be changed. They will not be the same. (*The Matrix*: blue pill vs. red pill)

They had an openness of heart, just like the Ninevites, allowing them to receive Jesus' message. The Ninevites were changed, as they came to believe in God. These four brothers were changed also, as they would become fishers of men, and the great Apostles in our Church that we know them to be.

There is a similarity between the preaching of Jonah and the preaching of Jesus, that is both centered around repentance of sin. For our lives to change in the spiritual sense, for conversion of heart to be real and authentic, we need to acknowledge our sin, receive God's mercy, and take that first step away from sin.

Detaching ourselves from sin, and attaching ourselves to God is how transformation happens. The example of the Ninevites and these Apostles show us the truth of this reality. Our lives won't be changed if we don't walk away from what pulls us away from Christ.

The same transformation Jesus offered to these brothers on the shores of the Sea of Galilee is also extended to us. If we leave our sin and follow Him, we embark on the greatest adventure in this life, and that is the Christian life. There is an opportunity this week for all of us to begin the Christian adventure. This Thursday we will have an opportunity for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament from 7-8pm. Confessions will be offered as well. Come and sit with our Lord in the Eucharist and make a response of heart, just like the Apostles.

Jesus is telling us today, "Come and follow me." What is our response?