

Third Sunday – THE WORD OF GOD

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7:29-31; Mk 1:14-20

Going away or leaving someone dear to us or something of value behind can be difficult. Many years ago, as a teenager, I had to flee the Communist Vietnam and left behind my mother, siblings and friends without any hope of seeing them again. It was one of the most difficult experiences I had ever gone through.

Similarly, it is no different when someone leaves us in death or when we are forced to relocate for work, leaving the beloved islands, all that is familiar and of our family and friends. It is one of the most difficult things to do.

Today we heard in Sacred Scripture two passages in which God called people to serve him. And this “**calling**” involved leaving everything and following God’s voice -- wherever it led.

In the First Reading from the prophet Jonah, we heard how God’s invitation led Jonah to prophesy to the people of Nineveh. This saying “yes” to God yielded good fruit -- repentance on the part of the Ninevites, and mercy from God.

What we shouldn’t forget, however, is the first time that God called Jonah. Jonah fled from the invitation. He ran away from God and avoided doing what God asked him to do. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah ran in the opposite direction from where God was asking him to go. Why? We don’t-know for sure.

Maybe he simply liked things the way they were. Maybe it was difficult for him to leave home and go where God asked him to. Maybe he’d rather see the city and citizens of Nineveh be completely destroyed, but God extended to them mercy.

And that is exactly what happened. God saw their actions of repentance, heard their prayers, and decided not to let their city be destroyed

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Unlike Jonah who resisted God's will, trying to run away from it, we heard in the Gospel of how Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John. And the story doesn't give us any of the details -- what they were thinking or feeling or worried about. It simply says that,

“ . . . they abandoned their nets and followed him.”

Two thousand years later we're still striving to follow their example, still striving to place our trust and hope -- our very lives -- in God. I wish I knew if they wrestled with Jesus' request.

My guess is that they too probably liked things the way they were -- and maybe were a little fearful about what the future would hold for them. One thing is for sure, their fears and concerns didn't get the best of them. God invited -- and they said "yes"; God called -- and they followed.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

When we say "yes" to God, when we become disciples of Jesus, we all have to leave something behind. The challenge of being a Catholic, a follower of Christ, goes far beyond these walls.

The journey to true discipleship is not always easy; we will meet people along the way that seem anything but Christian.

Many years ago, Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote this on her own road to discipleship, it contains some valuable truths about our own calling.

"People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;
forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
be kind anyway.

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If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; **succeed anyway.**

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;
build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;
give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; it was never between you and them anyway.

Dear friends, accepting God's invitation requires a stepping out in faith on our part. And this invitation cannot be answered by doing nothing - by being the same, acting the same, or thinking the same. It can only be answered by responding in faith, generosity, kindness, goodness, patience, understanding and in love that Mother Teresa spoke of.

And this means that we must be willing to leave something behind and take on something new, to let our old lives pass away and keep what is most important -- our lives in God, for God, and with God.

So, let's have the courage to let God and trust God each day. Let us be willing to go where God wants us to go, do what God wants us to do, and most importantly be who God wants us to be.

May God help us all be true disciples of Jesus today and always.