

## Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

I had to smile when I read the first reading for today from the prophet Jonah because everything worked out so well. Jonah is told by God to go to Nineveh and tell them of their need to repent. He does so, giving them a dire warning of imminent destruction, the people repent, God saw their efforts and God relented by not inflicting the disaster he had threatened. To sum up what we have heard, God speaks, Jonah responds, Jonah speaks, the people respond, God relents. Job done.

But that is not the whole story. The lectionary omitted to tell us that this was the **second** time God had called Jonah, the only prophet in the whole of the OT to be called twice! The first time God called Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell the people to repent, he went in the opposite direction and took a one way boat trip to Spain. Free at last, he thought, but God had other ideas. There was a storm, the crew prayed, Jonah was asleep and when they woke him realised his refusal to listen to God was the cause of the storm. He was thrown overboard presumably to drown, but God had other ideas, and Jonah is taken into the depths to be born again. Something in Jonah has to die so God sends him on a renewal course for three days in a most unexpected place. Jonah is faced with himself, with what he has done, he reflects and he repents and promises to fulfil the word of God. When that happens he is delivered from the depths and deposited on dry land, which brings us to the beginning of today's passage. This, second, time he does what God ask of him as we heard. Jonah is the patron saint of all reluctant prophets, indeed of all reluctant followers of Christ. There is probably a bit of Jonah in all of us.

Jonah was called to preach repentance and Jesus' public ministry begins with a call to repentance. But did you notice the first five words, 'After John had been arrested...' Mark places the beginning of Jesus' public ministry against the background of political opposition, giving a warning that what happened to John will happen to Jesus, and indeed his followers. Despite this opposition Jesus says that the time has come, the kingdom, the rule, the reign of God is close at hand, repent and believe the Good News. Repent, as we know, is more than sorrow for past sins, it involves a willingness to let the word of God, or indeed other people, throw a new light on our lives and to lead us to be transformed into the people God wants us to be.

Following the call to repent and believe, we have the call of the first four disciples, called to leave what they knew, family, occupation, homes and so forth to set foot into an uncertain future. They take that risk and there will be times when they are out of their depth, like Jonah. The gospels are silent about the reaction of Zebedee or Peter's wife as these four down tools and respond to the promise that it is people they will catch in the future rather than fish. This tells us that we need to concentrate on our call to discipleship rather than what others might think. We, too, are called to follow Jesus and this will sometimes involve leaving the familiar, experiencing the unexpected, and stepping out in faith and trust to an uncertain, but hope and promise filled future.

## Bidding Prayers for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Celebrant:

The kingdom, the rule, the reign of God is present among us, indeed among all peoples. Conscious of so many needs in our world we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will help all people to hear God's call to be the people God wants them to be and to fulfil the vocation, whatever that might be, each has been given.

Lord in your mercy

For President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris as they respond to the call to high office in the United States – that they will be guided by the Holy Spirit and nurtured by God's Word as they serve their country and reach out to the world.

Lord in your mercy

For world leaders and Governments – that they will work for a fairer distribution of the world's precious resources, act with justice, seek to resolve conflicts by negotiation and act to prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves – that we will hear Jesus' call to repent of all that holds us back from following him with generous hearts.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic, and Rosaline Cox, Margaret Collins, Michael Friedrich, Seth Mills, Thomas Kennedy, Jane, Carr, Ronald Brooks, Brenda Stott and Anthony Keogh whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Loving God, your Son calls us to follow him as he called the disciples in today's gospel. Help us to respond with open hearts, with courage and with compassion for all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen