

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
JANUARY 21, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

God wants even pagans to come to Him.

The time is short for the coming of the Lord.

Jesus wants disciples to follow him *now*.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions that an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Mark:

In Mark's Gospel, there is always a note of urgency to everything. *Immediately* after this or that, Jesus went on *right away* to do something else. "*The time is now!*" "*At once*, Jesus asked them to come with him." There is no time just to be casual about so important a message as the one brought by Jesus. We need to hear: "The kingdom is *now*!" Waiting for another time in the future will not work.

The good news that Jesus brings consists in this: All that God has done in the past will now begin to bear fruit. Salvation is available to all *now*, not just a promise of salvation for some future life, after death. God's reign is made real in Jesus. All who surrender their lives to Jesus do come under the rule of God, immediately. That surrender happens when we repent. To repent is not just to feel sorry for our sins. It consists in the action of turning our lives around to bring them into conformity with God's will. To "believe in the Gospel" is not just something in the head and mind and feelings. It is a handing over of one's whole self to the Message and to the Messenger, Jesus Christ.

One of the formulas used in imparting ashes on Ash Wednesday goes like this: "*Repent! And believe in the Gospel!*"

Once we have given ourselves over to Jesus Christ and to his values, we need to continually renew that self-giving. A once-and-for-all conversion is not much of a conversion. It wears thin with time. The liturgy and the Lectionary offer us the recurring of seasons during which we will dig ever deeper into the mystery of our conversion.

With wholehearted abandon, we have come close to Jesus; with urgency, we follow him on the road to the cross and to his resurrection. "They left their nets and followed him. They left their father, Zebedee, in the boat along with the other men!"

Jonah:

The prophet Jonah is better known for his sojourn in the belly of the fish than for his prophecy concerning God's mercy to all nations through the mission given to Israel. The book is about God's compassion to all people, even those who were not "chosen." God's compassion and mercy are clearly to be extended to all peoples through the ministry of the nation of Israel. Christians have come to see Jesus Christ in the collectivity of the people of God sent to all nations to call them to salvation. Jonah himself represents the Jewish people who, after the Exile, had come to a rather rigid attitude of defensiveness and exclusiveness with respect to other nations. They saw all outsiders as enemies and as threats to their religious purity. Surely, God could not love and forgive all those pagans! Jonah is angry that the Ninevites repent and are forgiven. The lesson is that even God's Chosen People need to change, to repent also.

Corinthians:

Paul in writing to the Corinthians now deals with the urgency of spiritual priorities in view of the Second Coming of Christ. Since the time is indeed short, should we not give first attention to the things of the spirit? Paul may have been convinced that Christ was to return in the immediate future. Or, he may have been saying that whatever time we have, it is always very short, when we will have to give an account for our lives. In this context, marriage is not an absolute requirement for all people. The practice of consecrated celibacy in the Church today continues to call attention to the fact that life in this world is not forever. The rest of the Church and the world at large need to be reminded that *the time is short*. Those who have given up marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God testify daily to that teaching.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Suppose Jesus calls two young women with very promising careers in banking and in law to leave everything and to go establish a shelter for battered women and children-at-risk. Would you see this as a sign that the kingdom of God is still breaking out in our world? What are some of the other signs that God is still at work in the world today? Does God also work for good in the secular world? How can those events be signs of salvation for us, too?

2. Have you noticed how Jesus uses the very human and natural skills of the disciples (fishermen) to illustrate how the kingdom will be built up? What are some of your natural and human skills that you have put to use in working for God's glory? Look around your group and compare the variety of gifts and of training that are available for working at the "harvest of the Lord." How can the Church make better use of the ordinary things in people's lives to promote the Gospel message?

3. The Church is reminded that its most exalted duty is true discipleship to the Lord. How can this community make its discipleship more obvious and more faithful? How can the group you belong to become more overtly and more explicitly a gathering of true disciples? What are some of the signs of authentic discipleship? What would your group need to do concretely to manifest its commitment to Jesus Christ?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Does your group have a clear “mission” that is consistent with the overall mission of the Church? Identify your group mission and state it as clearly as possible.

PRAYER

**To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.
From Psalm 25**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Every Christian has a *call* and a *mission* given by God. Each of us has a *vocation*. God does not call anyone to the kingdom without also sending that person on a mission for the sake of the kingdom. The fact that we have been baptized is evidence enough that God has called and has given us a mission or responsibility. We have been called to the kingdom and to the works of the kingdom. No need to waste any energy wondering whether or not we have been called by God. We have! Now, let us get on with it and do something with it.

We are called and gifted by God. God’s call is a creative act. By the same divine energy with which we are invited to come close to God, we were also endowed with spiritual energy called “grace.” We should never insult God by saying we have no gifts or that we have not been gifted. The question is not whether we have been gifted, but rather, “What IS the gift I have received from God?”

No one becomes a Christian just to bask in the comfortable glow of God’s presence. We have a job to do. We have been given a mission. We have a task assigned to us. We have a work to perform. Our membership in the family of God has a purpose. God has chosen us to do a specific work in the household of faith.

Each person has a vocation. (The word “vocation” simply means “call.”) Priests and women religious are not the only Christians with a vocation. Your vocation may not be identical to mine, but it is still divinely given; you and I are equally accountable to God for our respective response to our personal vocation. Our primary vocation is to be and to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. We each have an assignment to complete in this world, for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Buckminster Fuller, the noted architect and philosopher, said in reference to our ecological responsibility, “There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all crew.” We are all responsible for the environment in which we live. Our earth is like a spaceship on a long journey. We all need to work together to keep it tidy and in working order. In the same way, every member of the Church is personally responsible for some portion of the Church and its mission and ministry.

The parish is not like a “filling station” where we drop in for a “fill-up,” put in our money and drive off. We all have “hours on duty” at that place. It is more like a supermarket where each of us is also responsible for stocking the shelves. As disciples, we each have a mission and a ministry.

**See: The Catechism: # 542-43, 737,778,825, 836,1694
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