

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 21, 2018 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD's bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed," when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

Psalm: Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (4a) Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice
and teaches the humble his way.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had direct instructions about our lives, like the ones in the First Reading and the Gospel? Instead of going around in a fog and trying our best to remember how to live, maybe how to pray once in a while, and to get to Mass at least on Sunday, wouldn't it be great to be caught up into a command that focused our lives, drew us on like a far-shining star? Yes. But notice that in the First Reading Jonah was quite repelled by the call God gave him. And in the Gospel the disciples surely had no idea what they were getting into when they dropped everything and followed Jesus. Would they have been so quick if they had known about the crucifixion? It is probably best to begin with the beginning of Jonah's story (Jonah, 1:1), which is several chapters earlier than our present reading.

There God says to Jonah, "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it; their wickedness has come up before me." Jonah does exactly the opposite, like a house cat does sometimes. He drops everything and races off to Joppa and boards a ship to Tarshish, apparently trying to get as far from God's words as possible. So God sends a terrible storm. Jonah admits to the crew that he is fleeing God. He says, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea and then the sea will calm down for you, for I know that this great storm has come upon you because of me." When nothing else works, with great reluctance, they toss him overboard. The sea turns quiet. Jonah in turn is swallowed by a "large fish," usually referred to in tradition as a whale (Jon 2:1). Residence there gives Jonah plenty of time for retrospection. He prays a psalm-like prayer about what he has done. God hears him and saves him and tells him a second time to go to the great and sinful city of Nineveh to announce the Lord's message. Jonah submits at last and in today's First Reading the whole city is converted.

Why in the world didn't Jonah just follow God's command instead of running off in the opposite direction? One speculation is that Jonah did not want Nineveh, the pagan city, to convert and be saved because this city was an enemy of the Hebrews. But you and I both know what it is like to run from what God asks, so we can make our own speculations. As for the apostles (Gospel), they didn't run away at all. They followed Jesus almost blindly. Possibly they wanted political action. With Jesus' gentle guidance they found out gradually what following the Messiah really meant. Whereas Jonah had imagined the worst and run away, the apostles imagined the best and ran to follow Jesus. As it happened, they ran into the worst: the passion and crucifixion. Lucky for us all, the resurrection followed since suffering seems to be inevitable in human life, and here was an answer. Question: are you running away, like Jonah, or running, like the apostles, toward Jesus? Either way you will surely have suffering. But God will keep after you, pulling you out from fishy environments, pushing you, over and over, asking you to learn, in your obedience, what love is really about.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What do Jonah's and Jesus' announcements have in common? Were both calling people to conversion and to do good? Were these announcements intended for every nation and every person on earth? Did Jonah run away from Yahweh when he was called? Can you relate to that sometimes?
2. Do you think the message in this reading concerns preparation for the next life or happiness in this life? Does putting your security in the goods of this world make you happy? Paul says, "Let ... those using the world [act] as not using it fully." Could this be a recipe for happiness now?
3. Must you be called as a missionary and, for instance, go to Africa? Or could your call be to bring the Good News wherever you are, in whatever you do? Which way does Jesus call you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen