

HOM 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday 2024 B Jan 21

The prophet Jonah wanted the destruction of Israel's enemies – the Assyrians – instead of their conversion. That's why, at first, he ignored God's command to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh and took a ship going in the opposite direction, across the Mediterranean Sea to Tarshish, Spain.

But the Lord did not let him off the hook just like that. Instead, He made a furious tempest erupt that threatened the ship. Jonah acknowledged to the crew that he was cause of the storm and told them to throw him overboard. Reluctantly, and asking God's mercy, they did so, and the sea's rage abated.

At the Lord's bidding, a large fish swallowed the prophet, who remained in its belly three days. There, Jonah offered prayer of contrition and thanksgiving. The Lord then commanded the fish to spew Jonah upon the shore, where the word of the Lord came to him a second time to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh.

This time Jonah went, announcing: *"Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed."* The results were astonishing. The whole city, starting with the King of Nineveh immediately believed in God and repented. They fasted and put on sackcloth instead of robes. And so, God did not carry out the destruction He had threatened.

But this made Jonah angry. He even asked God to take his life if Nineveh was not destroyed. He then left the city to the east and waited for it to happen.

But the Lord, wanted to teach the prophet something. So, He made a large plant grow up next to Jonah which gave him shade and pleased him. The next day, however, God sent a worm to attack the plant so that it withered. And when the sun arose, God also sent a burning east wind, and Jonah became faint from the heat. Jonah then asked for death.

*You are angry over the plant, God said to him, which cost you no labor and which you did not raise. It came up in one night and in one night it perished. Should I not be concerned over Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than a hundred twenty thousand persons, who cannot distinguish their right hand from their left, not to mention the many cattle?*

This is a humorous Biblical short story, the shortest book in the Old Testament, whose historicity cannot be completely discounted, even though it seems more like a parable. Despite its brevity and humor, it has a very important lesson which is this: SINCE GOD WANTS THE CONVERSION, AND NOT THE DESTRUCTION, OF PEOPLE, SO MUST WE.

That's why God became Man in Jesus, and Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel reading, went about proclaiming the Gospel message and exhorting everyone to *"Repent, and believe in the Gospel."* That's also why He chose apostles and taught them to be "fishers of men".

*"This is the time of fulfillment,"* He announced, when God's plan for Man's salvation, foretold by the prophets, is now being carried out. That plan, as we know from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (1: 3-10) is to bring all things into oneness with Christ in His eternal self-offering to the Father in praise, thanksgiving, and loving obedience. In the end, this oneness with Jesus is the one necessary thing.

Bringing people into this saving oneness with Jesus is the mission of the apostles, the mission of the Church, our mission as Catholic faithful. That oneness with Jesus is initiated with Baptism. It is strengthened, preserved, restored, and augmented in the other sacraments, and it is brought to perfection in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Vatican II pointed to this. It affirmed that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives as Christians, and taught that “full, conscious, and active participation” in the Mass is needed to home into this. It furthermore named the “offering of Jesus” and “offering of themselves with Him” at Mass as being at the heart of this. This is what the Blessed Mother did, and will help us do.

Every other good thing we do somehow leads to this. And this somehow prompts and perfects every other good thing we do. This is how the Bride of Christ is brought into consummate oneness with the Bridegroom on the Cross and unto Resurrection, and communicates the Holy Spirit in oneness with Him to others, so that all the willing can join in.

In our second reading, St. Paul conveys a message of urgency to the faithful of every age: *“Time is running out....the world in its present form is passing away.”*

We know that the window of opportunity we have to get to know God and to respond to His love for us and to His will will close. Our time will run out, and the world as we know it will pass away as we enter into eternity with Jesus, or apart from Him, forever. So it will be with every person.

And God seeks the salvation of every person. The Lord wants all the willing to be united with Himself in the Father’s House, in the new heavens and the new earth. He needs us to make this known, even to our enemies – the People of Nineveh – inviting repentance, conversion, conformity to Jesus – as fishers of men.

As we go about this, one thing is necessary: Eucharistic Self-Offering for all whom we love and all whom the Lord loves. To do this, pray these words silently and sincerely at every Holy Communion, living them out in between:

I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS, THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.