

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday  
1/21/2024

## ON-GOING CONVERSION

Wandering around a room in the dark we can struggle to find a light switch to see the way. There can be a problem though. Once we turn on the light we can find that the room is messy. That it requires work to clean up. The light is helpful and yet the light also points out where changes need to be made.

In our lives, Jesus is that light. He allows us to see but in doing so points where we need to change. The light of Christ brings both comfort and challenge. Jesus calls people to repent and to believe in the gospel. To repent is to turn around from what is bad toward what is good. To believe is to accept the truth of God revealed by Jesus. It's also to trust. Conversion has been called seeing ourselves and our world in the light of God's grace and each reading today speaks with a sense of urgency.

Jesus calls the people to see themselves in the new light that he reveals. His light exposes their sinfulness and neediness. It reveals their need for repentance and yet it doesn't just stop there. It's not just a matter of out with the bad but also in with the good. Jesus calls people to repent and to believe in the gospel. Conversion is looking around the room with the light on and then doing what needs to be done.

Jesus calls people into the light, to repent and to believe. He calls people to follow him and they respond. Jesus calls in each of our lives. He calls us to repent, to believe and to follow him. His light reveals the dirt in our lives. We can resist this and yet when we come to see the dirt, we can do something about it. He calls us to believe, to step out in faith, accepting him and the gospel way of life. He calls us to follow him more closely. This isn't something we do once. Our lives are to be marked by the virtue of on-going conversion. From the newest baptized baby to the oldest and holiest of Christians, we're all called to lives of on-going conversion, of continually turning around, deepening our faith and following Jesus more closely.

In the second reading St. Paul speaks words that are curious and even disturbing. He speaks of weeping as though not weeping, the married acting as if they were not married and so forth. This is an earlier writing of Paul when he expected the second coming to be immediate. In time, he came to realize that God's timing was not necessarily what he thought it would be.

However, more basically, St. Paul speaks about the virtue of detachment. Detachment reminds us that our principal attachment is to be to God and that in light of that relationship, our other relationships fall into right order. This detachment reminds us that to be married to another person is not to own that person. In times of sorrow and joy to realize that both are passing. Those who buy and those who use the world can realize that what they do is something relative. Detachment or rather proper attachment, first to God, allows us to keep things in their proper perspective.

In the first reading, Jonah walks through the ancient city of Nineveh calling people to conversion. And they respond. Whenever we turn to God it is because God is first calling us out, seeking us out. The Ninevehites were not Jewish, in fact they persecuted the people of Israel and yet what we see here is God's concern for all people. God doesn't want destruction but that which is good.

The call to repentance is to some, a call to no fun. But this call is aimed not towards what is bad but what is good. To see someone wandering in the middle of a busy intersection and not alert that person is not to serve that person well. The call to repentance to believe is throwing a lifeline to a drowning person. It's a call to life, to new life.

Some cancers may make themselves felt quickly while others can spread without visible symptoms. In the first, there's something you can do while the second can be much more dangerous because you don't know about it. Sin is a cancer that can fall into these same two categories. The light makes us aware of those things we might otherwise miss. Seeing these things about ourselves can be disturbing but the first step in dealing with these issues is to be aware of them.

Two and a half years ago a light revealed a cancerous tumor in my colon. Because the light revealed it, something could be done about it. Very possibly, if not probably, that light saved my life. That was something both frightening but good. Frightening because of the possibilities but good because something could be done about it. When we hear the call to repentance, when the light of Christ reveals what in us needs to be changed, we're called to be grateful. It's been said that the worst punishment for sin is to be left in pleasure of our sins without any nagging from our conscience. The light of Christ reveals truth and the purpose of truth is to save.

Our lives are to be lives of ongoing conversion, of continually turning around, of continually believing and growing in faith. We do this together as members of the body of Christ helping each other on the journey. We do this informed by the word of God and strengthened by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Despite the challenge and even pain this can bring, it is always directed not towards what is bad but what is good. It is always directed not to death but to life, eternal life.