

3rd Sunday
1/24/2021

JOINING THE ADVENTURE

Imagine that God told you to make a journey on mission to San Francisco and instead you headed towards Baltimore. That's what Jonah did. The first reading says, The word of the Lord came to Jonah: 'Set out for the great city of Nineveh.' Now that wasn't the first time God told him that. That time he went off in the opposite direction where he ended up on a great misadventure. So this is a second time Jonah receives this call. Jonah was resistant but God was persistent.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were a cruel people who invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and shipped off into exile the people from ten of the twelve tribes of Israel where these tribes eventually lost their identity. Jonah is a reluctant prophet who called a harsh, pagan people to repent...and they did. These enemies of the Israelite people repent, they turn around and in turn God repents and doesn't inflict the punishment he seems to have intended for them. Human repentance leads to divine repentance. Jonah succeeds in the task God has given him, but he's not happy. Jonah isn't merely a reluctant prophet, he's a rather crabby one as well but there's something delightful about him in all his crabbiness.

If you want to know what happened to Jonah next, I encourage you to read the Book of the Prophet Jonah. It's literally just two pages in the Bible that you can read in minutes. You could read it during halftime. It makes not only for good spiritual reading but for some entertaining reading as well. In it, we find a call to follow and a call to repentance.

In the gospel today we find both a call to follow and a call to repentance but in reverse order. We can take repentance as something negative. It can be like a shaking finger and a berating voice saying, *You're bad and you better start being good.* Now that may be what some people need and if that works for you, more power to you. But there are deeper and richer meanings to repentance.

Repentance is a call to turn around. It's been called to change one's mind or purpose. You could say that repentance is learning to see differently; to see beyond ourselves, to see with the eyes of Christ; to look with eyes of faith.

Does repentance mean changing what we do? Yes. Does repentance seem to cramp our style? Sometimes. Does repentance mean embracing something that is hard? Sometimes. Does repentance bring with it new joys and new life? Yes. Can

repentance bring us to eternal joy and eternal life? Yes. Does repentance in one way lead us through the cross into new life? Yes.

It's been said that repentance is letting go of fear and trusting in God's love. At its highest and best point, repentance is when we come to realize the depths of God's love and in realizing that it can truly prompt us to let go of what is bad and to embrace what is good not out of fear but out of love. Repentance is always about hope because if there's no hope, there's no need to repent. Repentance calls us to turn away from what leads to death and to embrace what leads to life, eternal life. Repentance is about life.

Repent and believe in the gospel. We hear those words as we receive our ashes every year as Lent begins. Jesus' first public words in the gospel don't stop with repent but include a call to believe, to act with faith. Faith is more than just agreeing to a set of ideas. Although the content of faith is obviously important, faith also means trusting; it means acting; it means seeing differently. Both repentance and faith call us to see things differently.

There must have been something magnetic about Jesus. He finds Peter and Andrew and then James and John. He calls them to follow him and that's exactly what they do. He calls them on a great adventure and to follow Christ is an adventure, an adventure of repenting, believing and following.

And there's a message in all this for us. Like Jonah we can run the other way. We can reluctantly do what we're called to do. At times we may even complain or be crabby about it. Or we can act with repentance, changing our minds and hearts, believing in the fullest sense of the word by accepting, trusting and acting.

A year and half ago Pope Francis designated this Third Sunday of Ordinary time as the Sunday of the Word of God. Now obviously every Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is a Sunday of the Word of God, but the idea is to remember the important role the Bible should play in our lives as disciples of Jesus. And the Bible is something we encounter as members of the Church with the mind of the Church. So often people can feel intimidated by the Bible and while the word of God should certainly challenge us, it doesn't need to intimidate us. Here are three easy ways to make the Bible part of your life. The four gospels are the best place to start.

One—The gospels together make up 89 chapters. Read one chapter a day and in less than three months, you will have gone through all four gospels. Say a quick prayer, read and ponder. Don't worry if you don't understand everything, just read.

Two—If you're not ready to do that. Read just a short passage from the gospel each day, think about it briefly, pray about it briefly and then continue your day.

Three—Before dinner one night during the week read the gospel reading for the coming Sunday before you say grace and then talk about it over dinner. After Sunday Mass, talk about it again. If you live alone, just take the time to read and ponder the Sunday gospel yourself or do it with another person. Our weekly parish staff meetings start with a reading and discussion of the gospel for the coming Sunday.

Pope Francis says, *We need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness.* In other words, the Bible leads us to repentance, to faith and to following Jesus.

May we see the call to repentance as a gift that leads to new life. May we act with lives of faith, lives of intentional faith. May we let go of fear and join Peter, Andrew, James and John and millions of brothers and sisters through the ages in the great adventure of following Jesus Christ, of following Jesus everyday of our life.