
Sunday, January 21, 2018 – Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 | Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 | 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 | Mark 1:14-20

GLANCING THOUGHTS

The First Reading poses a puzzle that has bedeviled philosophers and theologians.

God commands Jonah to tell the people of Ninevah these words: Forty days more and Ninevah shall be destroyed.

Now, the people of Ninevah believed that God's words are true, and they repented. And God was pleased with them for believing his words and repenting.

BUT—God's words seem to be false. At any rate, forty days after Jonah's telling the people God's words, the city is still standing.

And so here is the puzzle: could God say words that are false, and could God be pleased with the people of Ninevah for believing a falsehood?

Philosophers and theologians have had a lot to say about this puzzle. But here is a simple thought.

When God's words call you, God puts your life at a cross-road. You can ignore him and continue stubbornly with your old life, as if God didn't really matter, or didn't really care what you did, or maybe didn't really exist at all. Or you can open yourself to God. You can respond to him

with a willingness to trust and obey. But if you do this, you will be leaving your old life behind for a new life that might well have been unimaginable to you beforehand. You won't be who you were before. You will be a new person, in God and for him.

The people of Ninevah respond to God's call in this second way. They believe God's words and will to be obedient to God, and that is why they repent their former ways. As a result they become very different from the people they had been. The whole city becomes a very different city from the one it had been.

There are, then, two ways in which the Lord's words to Ninevah can be true. Ninevah can be destroyed either because God demolishes the city or because the people cease to be the Ninevah that they were. Either way, the old Ninevah will no longer exist.

Therefore, God's words to Ninevah were true. When the people of Ninevah responded to God's words with trust and obedience, they ceased to be what they were—and the old Ninevah was destroyed.

God's words are always true, and God is always true to his word.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was God looking for in the Ninevites? What is God looking for in you? Does God call you to conversion once or over and over again? Why?
- Does your culture help or hinder your detachment from possessions (toys, gadgets, messages about the security that "things" bring)?
- 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?

FROM POPE FRANCIS

According to Pope Francis's statement below, do you have to be perfect to be called? Is the Lord with you when you make mistakes? How does he show his eternal love?

It seems in this passage that Simon, Andrew, James and John are chosen once-and-for-all: and yes, they were chosen! At this moment in the story, however, they had not been faithful to the last. After being chosen, they went on to make mistakes. ...

How did the Lord work it all out? He stepped in, He straightened the path, He put things right. Think of the great David, a great sinner, and then a great saint. The Lord knows. When the Lord tells us: 'With eternal love, I have loved you,' He is referring to this. The Lord has been thinking of us for many generations—of each and every one of us.

~Pope Francis, God's love is good beyond comprehension, January 14, 2014, Casa Santa Marta chapel

LIVING THE READINGS

- Consider, are running away from the Lord, like Jonah, or running toward Jesus, like the apostles? What is compelling you or holding you back from running to God? How can that be overcome (if holding you back) or shared with others (if compelling you)?
- Consider how God is calling you into a deeper relationship with Him through your life; how does your work, family, friends, hobbies bring you closer to God? How can we follow God in our everyday lives?