

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009**

This morning I would like to tell you an interesting history of a young priest I met a couple of years ago in Toronto, Canada. Before becoming a priest, that gentleman was working in a big store in the city as a salesman. From his job, he certainly had earned enough money to buy himself a condominium where he was living with his girlfriend.

One evening as he went to hang out with friends, he was involved in a car accident. The accident was so serious that he ended up with many surgeries and was in a coma for days. When he woke up in the Intensive Care Unit, he could not remember anything or recognize anything of what happened to him. Even when he recovered after many weeks in the hospital and went home with a limping left leg, it was a miracle. He was wondering why on earth God did spare his life.

This question was torturing him in his heart. For him, God was merciful to him because he wanted him to change his life. He spared his life in order to give him a second chance to live, to repent from his many sins and to come close to him. From that moment on, he understood that there was no better way to conversion than to offer to God the rest of his life as priest. So it was that he left everything behind him, entered the Seminary and, later, was ordained priest.

Why do I tell this story? I tell you this story to join the message of today's readings which focus on God's mercy toward us and invite us to act consequently and responsibly. The first reading relates to what happened to the habitants of Nineveh when they heard the preaching of Jonah as he invited them to conversion and repentance. As they turned away from their evil ways and repented, God forgave them.

The message of repentance is a permanent call to Christians of all times to leave the sins and to turn to God. This call finds its source in the teaching of Jesus, as described in today's Gospel. In fact, the Gospel message is all about the fulfillment of God's mercy to us and to which we have to give our response by our repentance and conversion.

That is why Jesus insists on repentance and believing in the Gospel. Repentance means a radical change of a way of living, thinking and being. That is why it has something to do with abandoning the sins and living by God's commandments. Most of the time, however, we make a confusion between sorrow for the consequences of sins and sorrow for sins. In fact, many people are sorry for the consequence their sin will bring than for the sin itself. If, for instance, they were sure they could escape the consequence, they would certainly do the same thing again. But what Jesus wants is a real hatred of sin and a sincere love of God's commands.

In the same way, when Jesus invites us to believe in the Good News he brings, he wants us to trust his word, to believe that God is really such as he tells us, that his love is so great that he is able to forgive us and give us a new chance of life. It is to that task that the disciples are called, that is, to become the co-

workers of Jesus. Those who say to others and repeat after Jesus: “The Kingdom of God is in your midst, repent and believe in the Gospel”.

Who are these people Jesus calls and makes his disciples? They are ordinary people without a lot of education, but called to do extraordinary things. In that sense, what counts most is not who they are, but what they will become under Jesus and what he can make of them. This sheds light on our personal vocation. God calls us as we are, with all our limitations and weaknesses, but he wants to make us the instruments of his work for the glory of his kingdom. He wants to transform us in order to fit the mission he gives us.

In order to succeed in this mission, we have to live detached from earthly things. We have to abandon everything and put ourselves unreservedly at the disposition of Jesus. That is what he has done with the disciples who abandoned boats, nets and families in order to follow him. Without this detachment we cannot succeed in the task of becoming fishers of men. What it means, in other words, is that nothing should stand in our way when it comes to following Jesus.

It is in that sense we have to understand the insistence of St Paul in the second reading as an invitation to take seriously our relation to Jesus. In fact, our life is so precious that we cannot run the risk of spoiling it stupidly by ignoring the call of Christ. Of course, the things of the earth have their real importance; but it is relative with regard to our eternal life. We have to live in this world, not in despising the world and its goods, but with our eyes fixed on our eternal salvation.

In other words, St Paul would like to say that human values, possessions, joys, and even marriage, are relative to the ultimate value of eternal life. Therefore, we have to be careful not to attach our hearts too much to things that pass away. We have to appreciate them in the limits of what they are and no more.

However, one thing is to care for our eternal salvation and another to despise any human relationship and even healthy marital relationships under the pretext of pursuing holiness. In fact, there is a tendency among some Christians to neglect their legitimate and religious obligations as husband and wife under the pretext of pursuit of holiness. Anything we do in that sense for selfish reason has nothing to do with sanctity, but the satisfaction of our egoism.

In this year consecrated to St Paul, let us learn from St Paul what it means to be a true disciple by responding generously to the call of Jesus. We pray for all those who have responded to God’s call in various ways that he strengthens them in their vocation. We also ask the Lord to help us discover the true value of the things of this world that cannot be compared to our eternal salvation. May God bless you!

**Jonah 3, 1-5, 10; 1 Corinthians 7, 29-31; Mark 1, 14-20**



Homily Date: January 25, 2009

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Document Name: 20090125homily.pdf