

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012**

All the readings of this Sunday talk about repentance and the change of life. They invite us to welcome God's mercy and forgiveness as he shows his compassion.

The first reading recalls the mission that Jonah had received from God to bring the people of Nineveh to conversion and to abandoning their sinful ways. It describes in particular the work of Jonah on the ground and the reaction of the people of Nineveh to his teaching.

In fact, when Jonah received the mission from God, he set out for Nineveh. He walked throughout the whole country announcing the imminence of God's judgment on the city and inviting the people to repentance. After having listened to him, all the people believed in God, fasted and put on sackcloth as a sign of repentance. As a result, God forgave them and spared their country from punishment.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is merciful and compassionate. Whatever might be his intent to punish people because of their sins, once they repent he forgives them and pardons them. Another idea is that because God is merciful, he does not withdraw his forgiveness to any one of those who convert from their sinful ways.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus starts his public mission. First of all, the Gospel relates the teaching of Jesus in Galilee and its content. It shows that the focus of the teaching of Jesus was about the imminence of God's kingdom and its fulfillment. For Jesus, the time has come as God has willed in his plan. Therefore, people have to believe in his kingdom and to repent of their sins.

The Gospel shows also how Jesus came to choose his first disciples and joins them to his mission. It gives us equally an idea of what type of people the disciples were and what kind of job they were practicing before following Jesus. Finally, the Gospel shows us how the disciples reacted once Jesus called them.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about God's time. When Jesus says in the Gospel that "this is the time of fulfillment", he is not talking about human time, but rather the time of God. In fact, as human beings, we subdivide our time in days, weeks, months and years according to the human calendar. As such, our time is chronological. That is why the calendar is important for us.

God's time, on the contrary, does not correspond to the human calendar and does not obey human laws. It transcends the limits of space and human calculation. That is why God's time is unique and fitting for the salvation of his people. That time of God has been fulfilled when God sent his Son into the world. That time of God is a time of salvation and requires a "prompt and now-decision" in order to enter into the kingdom of God.

The understanding of the concept of God's time is very important for us, because sometimes we are disappointed and even frustrated when we realized that our prayers do not receive an answer in due time. But that is precisely our time and not God's time. What we forget, however, is that "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

The second thing we learn is about the importance of repentance. The call to repentance or the conversion of heart is, indeed, one of the most important attitudes of our life as Christians and disciples of Jesus. This is a permanent attitude we should have in order to conform ourselves to the life of Jesus. We have always to check our lives in the light of Jesus' word and God's commandments and to be ready to repent. Without a life of permanent repentance, it is easy to become complacent in our faith and presumptuous of God's mercy.

When we are talking about repentance, it is not like a simple regret about things we did not do right. It is all about the change we need to bring into our lives and the transformation of our ways of being, living and thinking in the footsteps of Jesus. Without that vision, we cannot be in the same line of thought with Jesus. That is why it is important to stop confusing the sorrow we should feel for the sins and the sorrow people sometimes have because of the consequence the sins would bring into their lives. In that case, if people could be sure to avoid the consequence of their sins, I presume they would still do the same thing. But, that is not what Jesus wants of us.

The third thing we learn is about the identity of the disciples. The men that Jesus called to be his disciples were not extraordinary people, but simple fishermen. Although they were ordinary people, Jesus called them to do extraordinary things. In that sense, what counts most is not who they are, but what they will become under Jesus' leadership.

This episode sheds light on our own personal vocation. In fact, God calls us as we are, with all our limitations and our 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 wants to give us. Moreover, God meets us and calls us in the very ordinary circumstances of life and our very places of work to follow him. The problem is all about the courage to accept and to go after him.

The last thing is about the importance of detachment. It is quite impressive to realize that when Jesus called the disciples, they all left their initial jobs and families in order to follow him. What it means, in fact, is that nothing should stand in our way when it comes to following Jesus. That is why without detachment, it is very difficult to be a disciple of Jesus.

That is the reason why St Paul insists in the second reading that we do not give to the things of this world an absolute value. 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. 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. Let us pray, then, that God may help us to respond to his call and to repent of our sins in order to work freely for him! May God bless you all!

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



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