

### THIRD SUNDAY IN OT B2021

Pope Francis has decreed for the whole Church that the third Sunday in Ordinary Time will become the Sunday of the Word of God. This Sunday corresponds to the first proclamation of the Gospel by Jesus and the choice of his first disciples. At the heart of Jesus's proclamation of Jesus, there is an appeal to repentance and an invitation to believe in the Gospel.

A big obstacle to the acceptance of the Gospel's message and the growth in faith is often the reality of sin. That is why, the first reading of this Sunday shows how sin has deeply entered into the life of the people of Nineveh. In order to heal it, God sends Jonah to warn them lest they incur a punishment.

Fortunately, the people of Nineveh listened to Jonah's message, changed and repented of their evil doings. Because of that change, God forgave them and renounced to punish them.

The point of this text is clear. When people listen to the word of God and resolve to change their lives by renouncing the sins, God forgives them. God does not take pleasure in punishing people, but rather in pardoning them. His mercy and compassion are bigger than human sins. Anyone who leaves the sins behind by living in godly manner is loved by him and restored in friendship with him.

That was the mission of Jesus, namely to tell people that they are loved by God who has fulfilled his promise to send them the Messiah. In him, God's kingdom has arrived in their midst. Therefore, they had to accept it and change their lives.

As it appears, for Jesus, repentance is a necessary condition for receiving salvation. Why? Because if we do not align our hearts and our life with God's law and demands, we cannot have any relationship with him. That is why Jesus insists on repenting and believing in the Gospel.

Repentance for Jesus, as it is in the biblical language, is more than turning away from sin. It is rather the change of mind that eventually results in a change of life and action. For Jesus, repentance should lead to the acceptance of the Gospel as a way of life that sets the one who believes in the path that leads to God and to the reception of eternal salvation. If there is truly repentance, it should lead to a change of life and the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah sent by the Father for the salvation of the world.

Repentance is a permanent attitude at the heart of our Christian life. We cannot have access to God and a true relationship with Jesus if we are not repentant. For that reason, 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 a permanent repentance, it is easy to become complacent in our faith and presumptuous of God's mercy.

However, it would be a shame to reduce repentance to a simple regret of our sins or a sorrow we feel about the things we did not do right. True repentance, on the contrary, is about the change we need to bring into our life and the transformation of our ways of being, living and thinking in order to follow 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 people feel for the sins they have committed in

afflicting the heart of God, and the sorrow people have because of the consequence the sins bring into their lives.

This distinction should be made clear to anyone of us so that we come to know where to stand in our faith and what we have to do in order to please our God. If not, the result would be that if, for instance, people could be sure that they would avoid the consequences of their sins, they would certainly continue do the same thing again.

In other words, they would still continue committing the same sins as long as there is no immediate consequence for it. I wonder if that is not how we function in our relationship with God with regard to the reality of sin.

What Jesus pursues in teaching repentance, in truth, is a real change of life so that it is turned to God forever. It is the same logic that guides the appeal of Jesus to believe in the Gospel. What he wants is that we trust his word; we truly accept that God is as he presents himself to us, that is, a merciful Father who forgives and gives us a new chance of life. Moreover, when Jesus chose the first disciples, the goal was not different. He wanted that they become his coworkers who teach others to repent and believe in the Gospel.

What strikes in the choice of the first disciples is that they are just ordinary people. But, these ordinary people are called to do extraordinary things, that is, to become coworkers of Jesus. Like him, to proclaim the word of salvation to their brothers and sisters, to help them to come close to God and receive salvation.

One of the consequences we draw from the choice of the first disciples is that God calls us as we are. However, the most important is not who we are, but what we will become under Jesus guidance. We might be weak, sinners, incapable of speaking in public, but as we are, with these limitations, God can change us and make us true instruments of his word for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

Moreover, when God calls us, it is not that we remain as we were, but we change and adopt another style of life comforted to the call. In other words, when we accept God's call, we have to change our lives, to become another person more than what we were before. In today's Gospel is shown the change to which the disciples are called. Jesus tells them: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men". From being fishermen, they become fishers of men. Let us ask the Lord to help us take seriously his call and to repent of our sins. May God bless you!

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



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