

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B2024

I would like to start this homily with a story 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 where he was a salesman. From his job, he had earned enough money to buy himself a condominium where he was living with his girlfriend.

One evening as he went out with friends, he was involved in a car accident. The accident was so serious that he ended up in the hospital with many surgeries. He was in the coma for many days in Intensive Care Unit. When he got out of it, he could not remember 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.

That question tortured him seriously in his heart. He concluded that God was merciful to him because he wanted him to change his life. He spared his life to give him a second chance to live so that he repents from his many sins and comes close to God. 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, 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 tells the story of the inhabitants of Nineveh. When they heard the preaching of Jonah inviting them to repentance, they did not hesitate to change. As they turned away from their evil ways and repented, God forgave their sins.

This act of repentance is a permanent call that our Lord addresses to us. The teaching of our Lord in today's Gospel is all about repentance. The mercy of God is fulfilled in the presence of our Lord in the midst of the world through the proclamation of the Gospel. To listen to our Lord is to heed the Father who is inviting us to repentance and conversion of heart. It is in our interest to give our response by leaving the sins behind us and turning to God.

Repentance and conversion mean a radical change of a way of living, thinking and being. They have to do with abandoning the sins and living by God's commandments. However, most of the time, we confuse sorrow for the consequences of the sins and the sorrow for the sins. Because of that confusion, many people are sorry for the consequences their sins might bring in their lives than for the sins themselves. For instance, if people could escape the consequences of their sins, I presume they would continue to do the same thing again and again. But what Jesus wants when he talks about repentance is a real hatred of sin and a sincere love of God's commands.

Moreover, when Jesus invites us to believe in the Gospel 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. They are called to become companions and coworkers of Jesus. They are called to talk to the world 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, like you and I, but called to do extraordinary things. 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 flaws and weaknesses, but he wants to make us the instruments of his work for the glory of his kingdom. He wants to transform us to fit the mission he gives us.

To succeed in this mission, we have to live detached from earthly things. We have to abandon everything and put ourselves unreservedly at his disposition. That is what he has done with the disciples who abandoned boats, nets and families to follow him. Without detachment we cannot succeed in the task of becoming fishers of men, like the first disciples.

What all that means 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. He invites us to take seriously our relationship with Jesus. Of course, the things of the earth have their real importance; but with regard to our eternal life, they are relative. 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. To neglect legitimate and religious obligations, as husband and wife, under the pretext of pursuit of holiness is ignoring that it is in our own vocation we have to find our way to sanctity. Anything we do for selfish reason has nothing to do with sanctity, but the satisfaction of our egoism.

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.

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



Homily Date: January 21, 2024
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Document Name: 20240121homily.pdf