

3rd Ordinary Sunday
January 24, 2021
“Justice and Mercy”

Jonah 3:1...10
1 Cor 7:29-31
Mk 1:14-20

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

No one likes to be hurt by another. No one likes it when someone takes advantage of us. And the depth of the hurt can be measured by the injustice that was perpetrated. Even whole nations have been permanently damaged by both domestic and foreign leaders.

When this happens, often we have no recourse. And as a result, we become resentful and angry. We can become vindictive and retaliatory. We can even hold hatred in our hearts.

However, none of these reactions are worthy of us. We should be able to rise above our own anger and vindictiveness. And one of the things that can help us is to remember the old adage: “What goes around, comes around.” Selfish and unjust people never get away with the harm and the pain they inflict upon others. Often, they will get their comeuppance in this life – and if not, then in the hereafter!

However, the scriptures for today bring us a new insight into the harm that others have done to us. Furthermore, they teach us how to become better persons in the way God deals with others, and with ourselves as well.

Jonah was an unwilling prophet. In fact, if we study his actions in this Old Testament parable, we see that he is a caricature of what a prophet should be. He was told to preach conversion to the Ninevites – who were the hated Assyrian enemies of the Chosen People. Consequently, he tried to sail away. Then when a great storm threatened the ship and everyone on board, Jonah told the pagan sailors that he was to blame for the storm. Subsequently, they became believers when Jonah jumped overboard and the sea became calm.

Next, Jonah was swallowed by some giant marine creature – and three days later, he was spewed forth on the very shores of Nineveh. Then, for three more days, Jonah preached conversion and repentance to the Ninevites – But he became depressed – and angry with God when they repented, changed, and God spared the city. The Book of Jonah deals with the mystery of how God can be both just and merciful. It also shows us that we are sinners ourselves if we do not forgive those who have wronged us even in the most grievous of ways. Thus, even Jonah, the unwilling prophet, had to become aware of his own sins, repent, and accept God’s mercy!

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus carries on the ministry of John the Baptist, who had been arrested and jailed by King Herod. That ministry was to preach conversion and repentance. It was time for everyone to change their hearts and their lives – It was time to believe in the good news of God’s mercy and love!

However, Jesus needed others who would carry on his own mission someday. So, Jesus began to recruit disciples, who would, one day, be apostles – Peter and Andrew, James and John. These were, no doubt, educated men well-versed in the scriptures – who were also stockholders in the Zebedee Fishing Company.

Yet, unlike Jonah, they were not reluctant or unwilling. All they needed was an invitation from Jesus. And they left everything behind: boats, nets, father, hired hands, and all the future profits. They wholeheartedly became disciples – Moreover, they would become prophetic heralds of the Good News that the Father had sent Jesus to proclaim!

In the New Testament passage, St. Paul teaches the Corinthians and us that our time here is never very long in the whole plan of God. Most of us tend to put too much emphasis on the things of this world. Paul and most early Christians thought that the Second Coming of Jesus was imminent. Hence, his urgent counsel to set all things aside.

Brothers and Sisters, over the ensuing centuries, Christians have learned that we just can’t set important things completely aside, like marriage, friendships, commitments, and earning a living. However, we can and must bring a new and different spirit to all that we do and possess. We can live and walk attuned to God. We can become truly detached from those things which dominate and possess us. Instead, we can allow ourselves to become possessed by God! Above all, we can learn to extend the love and mercy of God to all others – including our enemies and all those who harm us. We can hardly do otherwise, since God has been so merciful in our own regard!

So, let us pray, today, that like Peter, Andrew, James, and John – we can convert our own hearts – and become heralds of the Good News – by the way we live our own lives!

Amen.

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