

21 January 2018 (Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 24(25):4-6,7b-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20.

Repent, and believe the Good News.

In the gospel according to Mark, today's reading is the start of Jesus' ministry after his Baptism and his time in the desert. Jesus' message is very simple: repent and believe in the good news.

In the New Testament, the good news that Jesus talks about is the Father's invitation to listen to his Son and to get to know God himself. This is a strong enough message to make us want to change our way of life into a way that helps us approach God.

Some books of the Old Testament present us with a God who seeks revenge on those who offend him. Jesus comes with a different message; he teaches us that our God is a loving and forgiving God. The first reading from the book of Jonah is an interesting teaching from the Old Testament.

In this very short teaching story in the Old Testament, Jonah is called by God to go and preach to the people of Nineveh who were known for their sinfulness. Jonah refuses to go because he knew that if the people of that city repented after his preaching, God would then change his mind and forgive them. Instead of going towards Nineveh Jonah travels towards the end of the world, to Tarshish a place that is probably situated at the end of the known world.

Jonah travels by boat, is caught up in very rough a storm, and has to admit that he is running away from God's will for him. He is therefore tossed overboard where a whale picks him up and returns him to the place from where he had started off.

For a second time God asks Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. This time he obeys and invites the people to repent. They hear the message, do penance and are forgiven! At this Jonah protests and gets angry at God.

Jonah presents us with a very simple story: if we believe in the good news and repent, then we can enjoy God's generous forgiveness. The message of God's forgiveness is an important one to remember. God does not want to punish us for our sins, but to forgive us and to welcome us back into his life. Like the people of Nineveh I am invited to be open and to listen to God's word in my life. The gospels speak continuously of God's great mercy and forgiveness.

We also need to look at the parable of Jonah in order to learn to forgive others. Jonah was not ready to go and preach the good news to the people of Nineveh because he knew that God is a forgiving God. By not speaking in the name of God he was denying those people the possibility of hearing God's message. We too need to be open and welcoming to people who are ready to listen and repent. God's message of love and forgiveness is not only for us to keep hidden but for us to share and speak about.

In the gospel Jesus calls disciples and invites them to go out, he will make them fishers of people. I too can be a fisher of people by the way I live my life, proclaiming God's good news and welcoming those who are ready to repent and turn back to God.

Let us be ready to preach God's good news!

Fr Mario