

PRO-LIFE
HOMILY NOTES
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
24-25 January 2008

First Reading: Jon 3:1-5, 10
Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Second Reading: 1 Cor 7:29-31
Gospel: Mk 1:14-20

Jonah is a reluctant prophet who succeeds beyond all earthly expectation. We meet him in the first reading faced with God's demand that he preach repentance to people he has never met, in a city archeologists suggest might have stretched 25 miles. Jonah, like every true prophet, speaks not his own message but rather God's word. His homily was eight words long. "Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed." Less than a third of the people heard Jonah preach. It was not the power or extent of his oratory that accomplished anything. Rather, the people believed *God* when they heard him.

Two things happen at once. Violence stops. "Every man shall turn from his evil way and from the violence he has in hand." Penance begins. "They proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth." Exegetes point out that the text uses the same language for Nineveh's faith and for Abraham's faith in God (Gen. 15:6). Scholars also point out that the message of Jonah gave the people 40 days. This number reminds us of the forty days of the flood in the time of Noah, the forty years of the wandering in the desert after the Exodus. Forty is the classic time-line of conversion (forty days of Lent). Nineveh's conversion is heeded. "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way," he spared the city from destruction. God saw that they turned from violence and that they did penance. They saw his mercy.

The Psalm (25) pleads with God to teach us his ways. Send us prophets. The reading from Corinthians (1Cor. 7:29-31) adds a note of urgency. Paul is answering questions posed to him by the Corinthians, and now speaks of the coming of the Lord, exhorting the Christians to be detached from a world soon to pass away. The time is now for conversion, make no mistake about it. Time is running out. Do not cling to this world, it is passing away. The time for watchfulness is now, detach yourself from whatever distracts your vigilance.

The Gospel (Mk 1:14-20) stands in parallel and in contrast to the first reading. The word of God is sent with urgency and is proclaimed. But unlike Jonah, Jesus Christ is no reluctant prophet. He is the obedient and beloved Son who does the will of the Father. Even though the reading reminds us that this is right after John the Baptist has been handed over (prefiguring Jesus' own betrayal), Jesus is unafraid, bold, clear, and speaking with authority. His message is decisive, the time of fulfillment is at hand, do something now, repent and believe in the Gospel. Jesus calls out to the apostles, and

unlike Jonah, their response is an immediate and confident yes. No excuses. No delay. No reluctant prophets in the face of Jesus' call.

Pro-life preaching tips.

- This is an urgent time for prophets: Just as Jonah walked through Nineveh, hundreds of thousands of pro-lifers this past week have marched through Washington, DC, and others have marched in state capitals across the country. They marched on January 22nd, the 36th anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in our country. Not only does abortion-on-demand remain legal in our country, but pro-abortion activists and their allies in Congress are now promoting an agenda that would deprive Americans of their freedom to enact almost any restraint on abortion at any stage of pregnancy. They want to overturn hundreds of current laws on conscience rights, informed consent, limits on taxpayer-funded abortion, and parental involvement in minors' abortion decisions.
- And right now, Congress is working on extending the appropriations bills that fund all federal programs, and new funding bills covering the next fiscal year will be written in early spring. Many current laws on taxpayer funding, conscience rights, and other issues exist only as provisions in these bills, and could be eliminated with the stroke of a committee chairman's pen — paving the way for the more wholesale assault, if pro-life Americans do not voice their opposition early and clearly.
- Whether you marched or not, take courage from today's Gospel and take a step right now. Our parish (has) will have the opportunity to participate in a nationwide postcard campaign to protect the modest laws that have reduced abortions, and prevented outright government subsidies and mandates for abortion, for 35 years. These laws must not be swept away one at a time, or all at once by radical agendas such as the "Freedom of Choice Act" (FOCA). We will urge Congress not to start down this destructive path, but to serve the life, health and wellbeing of all Americans, beginning with the most vulnerable, the child in the womb.
- Political involvement is not something extra or optional, it is our duty. "The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith" (Faithful Citizenship #9). "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation" (Faithful Citizenship #13).

- Jesus is calling his disciples now, just as he called his apostles to share in his mission. “Some question whether it is appropriate for the Church to play a role in political life. However, the obligation to teach about moral values that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is central to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ” (Faithful Citizenship #11).
- Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.
- “What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person and about the sacredness of every human life helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square” (Faithful Citizenship #10).

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