

Sunday Message

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year B • 21 January 2024 • Psalter Week 3



We all know about Jonah in the belly of the whale. But we may wonder what this story is doing in the Bible.

How did this extraordinary story end up being placed in the Old Testament alongside the stories of such significant prophets as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah? Jonah is a very short story of only about 1,300 English words but it has a purpose and a message that is as relevant to believers today as when it was first recorded many centuries ago.

God orders Jonah to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, to urge them to repent and turn from their wicked ways. But Jonah resists; he doesn't want to go. He doesn't want to preach salvation to a bunch of foreigners. And so he runs away. He boards a ship bound for Spain but soon a storm brews and the ship is in danger of sinking. The pagan sailors draw lots to see who has brought them bad luck. Of course, they discover it is Jonah, who, knowing God is angry with him, asks them to throw him overboard, which they are happy to do, and the storm settles. God instructs a whale to swallow Jonah and, after three days, to vomit him up again, still alive.

Now God again asks Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time, though still reluctant, Jonah obeys. He preaches, the population of 120,000 is converted, and God spares the city from punishment. But rather than being happy for the Ninevites, Jonah is angry with God. He doesn't want these foreigners to be saved. He thinks that pagans should not benefit from God's mercy. And so in his anger, Jonah tells God to please put him out of his misery: "It is better for me to die than to live," he says.

He sulks outside the city, shaded from the sun by a plant that God provides. A worm then withers the plant, and Jonah roasts under the heat of the sun. Which again makes him angry enough to want to die. But God says to him, "You pity the plant for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow," and yet resent my pitying the people of Nineveh "who do not know their right hand from their left?". On that harsh note, the Book of Jonah ends.

How did the story of this reluctant, disobedient prophet end up in the Bible alongside great, obedient prophets like Isaiah? Because the story is not really about Jonah but about God. It is a reminder of God's goodness and how God's love and compassion is available to all - not just Jews, not just those we consider 'good' or deserving. God calls all to repent, no matter who they are, because God wishes everyone to be saved.

Jonah is used as an example, a warning to all narrow-minded Jews that they should not be myopic like Jonah and seek to restrict God and God's mercy. God is not just the God of the Hebrews but the God of all the children of Abraham, whoever they are, wherever they are, whatever they've done. God's mercy and forgiveness is freely available to everyone. Jonah found that too much to accept but, for the rest of us, it is wonderful good news. None of us is excluded from God's love and compassion. ■

REFLECT

A lesson of the Jonah story is: Don't narrow God. Don't limit God according to your own narrow notions. For a long time, our Church taught that only Catholics could be saved, that salvation was impossible outside the Catholic Church. Thank God, we have moved beyond that idea. Some Christians continue to believe that Catholics cannot be saved unless they

are born again. They exclude Catholics from the Christian community.

There are so many ways in which we can limit God. There is the God who has time only for devout Catholics who go to Mass and the sacraments regularly, the God who has no time for atheists or communists or liberals or those who are woke, the God who rewards only those we consider 'good' and punishes those we think don't measure up.

DO

Today's liturgy invites us to think about how we follow Jesus. A good way to follow Jesus is like this:

- Pray every day – if only for a few minutes.
- Be aware of God's presence with you every minute of every day.
- Go to Mass regularly.
- Be honest and just in your dealings with others. Gossip less; forgive more.
- Treat everybody the same.



PRAY

Think about your attitude to refugees and immigrants. Ask the Lord to give you a heart big enough to exclude nobody from your love.

SAY

"Help me, Lord, to see everyone the way you see them. Help me to exclude nobody from my love."

LEARN

Following Jesus means always putting him first.

To be a disciple means being prepared to follow even where we don't want to go.

Our discipleship only has meaning in belonging to a community of faith that follows Jesus along his way.

The Book of Jonah tells us we must always think big about God. God's love extends to all - Jew and non-Jew, Catholic and non-Catholic, the God-fearing and God-denying - and is freely available to all. God wishes everybody to be saved.

For God, there is no 'outsider,' no 'foreigner,' no 'them and us.' There is only 'us.' Imagine if we could think as big as God thinks. What a very different world we would have. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

O sing a new song to the Lord;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
In his presence are majesty and splendour,
strength and honour in his holy place.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
direct our actions according to your good
pleasure,
that in the name of your beloved Son
we may abound in good works.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

A reading from the prophet Jonah.

The word of the Lord was addressed to Jonah:
'Up!' he said 'Go to Nineveh, the great city, and
preach to them as I told you to.' Jonah set
out and went to Nineveh in obedience to the
word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was a city great
beyond compare: it took three days to cross
it. Jonah went on into the city, making a day's
journey. He preached in these words, 'Only
forty days more and Nineveh is going to be
destroyed.' And the people of Nineveh believed
in God; they proclaimed a fast and put on
sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.
God saw their efforts to renounce their evil
behaviour, and God relented: he did not inflict
on them the disaster which he had threatened.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 24 (25):4-6, 7b-9

Response:

Lord, make me know your ways.

- Lord, make me know your ways.
Lord, teach me your paths.
Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour. (R.)
- Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.
In your love remember me,
because of your goodness, O Lord. (R.)

- The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who stray,
he guides the humble in the right path,
he teaches his way to the poor. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the
Corinthians.

Brothers: our time is growing short. Those
who have wives should live as though they
had none, and those who mourn should live as
though they had nothing to mourn for; those
who are enjoying life should live as though there
were nothing to laugh about; those whose life
is buying things should live as though they
had nothing of their own; and those who have
to deal with the world should not become
engrossed in it. I say this because the world as
we know it is passing away.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
The kingdom of God is close at hand;
believe the Good News.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mark 1:14-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Mark.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into
Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News
from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the
kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and
believe the Good News.'

As he was walking along by the Sea of Galilee
he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting
a net in the lake – for they were fishermen. And
Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make
you into fishers of men.' And at once they left
their nets and followed him.

Going on a little further, he saw James son of
Zebedee and his brother John; they too were
in their boat, mending their nets. He called
them at once and, leaving their father Zebedee
in the boat with the men he employed, they
went after him.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;

through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Accept our offerings, O Lord, we pray,
and in sanctifying them
grant that they may profit us for salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Look toward the Lord and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, receiving the grace
by which you bring us to new life,
we may always glory in your gift.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

"What do the disciples share? What little they
have: five small loaves and two fishes. But it
is precisely those loaves and fishes that in
God's hands feed the whole crowd. And it is
the disciples, bewildered by the inability of
their means, by the poverty of what they have
at their disposal, who invite the people to
sit down, and – trusting the Word of Jesus –
distribute the loaves and fishes that feed the
crowd. This tells us that in the Church, but also
in society, a keyword that we need not fear is
"solidarity," that is, knowing how to place what
we have at God's disposal: our humble abilities,
because [it is] only in the sharing, in the giving
of them, that our lives will be fecund, will bear
fruit. Solidarity: a word upon which the spirit of
the world looks unkindly!"

(Pope Francis: Homily for Corpus Christi)