

Homily Notes for Sunday, Jan 21, 2018, III O.T. B

Readings: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; I Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20

1. Introduction: We are called today to make Jesus the top priority in our lives. All three readings demonstrate how we are called to follow Jesus. We are called to spread the Word about Jesus.

Let's say that the Pope called our house and said to me, "I choose you to help me." If that were to be the case, wouldn't it be something really special? Wouldn't we change our lives to be able to do what he wanted? How important would that be? How important it is to be called by someone really important! Now, is it not true that we are all being called by Jesus, the Lord of Heaven and Earth? This then calls us to set new priorities in our life? Let's look at our readings and how they inform us about being called.

2. Scripture lessons:

3. The first reading reminds us that the call that Jesus has for us may not be that which we feel like doing. Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh? It was because Nineveh was the capital of Israel's greatest enemy and Jonah knew that God was kind and merciful. No way did he want to go there and help them repent. Look at the struggle of Jonah just to avoid the will of the Lord. First, he fled in the opposite direction. Then he was thrown overboard in the midst of a terrible storm and swallowed by a whale for three days. God finally got his attention. Then the reluctant and unhappy prophet went to Nineveh and bluntly prophesied, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" Jonah had not even finished the first day of his preaching before the people had totally turned around – doing visible penance while asking and hoping for God's love, reconciliation, and forgiveness (in contrast to Israel's refusal to repent and reform). Exactly what Jonah did not want was true. The pagan peoples of the city "*believed in God*", "*renounced their evil behavior*" and God relented of His anger.

4. Lessons taught by Jonah story: This is probably not an historic account, but a didactic fiction, i.e. a story told in order to educate, the Jonah narrative had a double lesson for the inhabitants of Judah. First, in sending the main character of the story to foreign, pagan, Nineveh, the **universality** of God's saving purpose was underscored. Second, in the bigoted persona of Jonah, **the parochial and nationalistic sin** of the Judahites was exposed. Moreover, the spiritual response of the Ninevites was intended to awaken in the people of Judah a desire to repent of their sins and turn to God. God also wanted an attitude of respect, even missionary outreach, for other nations, who were often regarded as sub-human or as animals (dogs, swine) by the Jews. Notice that when Jonah preached his short message, the Ninevites *believed God* (v. 5). Conversion in Nineveh was effected, not by prophetic eloquence ("Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed!?!") but by God's power.

5. The Psalm Response highlights the need to be taught. It might well summarize our response to Jesus's call. "Teach me your ways, O Lord." In order to be able to respond to Jesus we do have to know what he wants.

6. In the second reading there is immediacy: St Paul emphasizes that "time is running out." He is calling on us to correctly **prioritize** things in our life that would lead to our salvation. Time is indeed running out. We need to take the steps to prepare ourselves to die. We need to be about examining our lives and priorities in order to fulfill the will of God. St Paul's examples may appear to be extreme. He apparently expected Jesus to come soon. We must discern what God has given us to do to build His kingdom on earth. He wants us to put Him first always.

7. Today's Gospel shows how the first disciples left everything behind in order to follow Jesus. They were fishermen. Simon and his brother Andrew left their nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their father to follow Jesus. Ordinarily, God doesn't want us to desert our spouses, our families, or our responsibilities. If he were to desire something like that, He must make it particularly clear. He

wants us to get ourselves established and grounded in our faith in order to give a good testimony as Christians in the midst of the world we live in.

8. First, the importance of following Jesus has to do with the salvation of one's soul? We talk about this frequently, but let us be clear, "What is our soul?" The Catechism defines "soul" to be:

The spiritual principle of human beings. The soul refers to the innermost aspect of man; "soul" signifies the spiritual principle in man." The soul is the subject of human consciousness and freedom; soul and body together form one unique human nature. Each human soul is individual and immortal, immediately created by God. The soul is invisible and does not have weight.

The soul does not die with the body, from which it is separated by death, and with which it will be reunited in the final resurrection (CCC 363, 366; cf. 1703).

"The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body." Indeed, in "out of body" experiences, the soul seems to express something of the "essential" form of the body. Example of Vietnam War amputee to have both legs when his soul separated from his body. We are often described as "composite" beings, not just physical or just spiritual but a union of both.

9. Jesus's call to us is to "Repent and believe in the Gospel." It was preeminently "Good News" that Jesus came to bring to men. The Good News is that God is our loving and forgiving Father who wishes to save us from judgment through His son Jesus. So St. Paul calls it the Good News of truth (Gal 2:5; Col 1:5), Good News of hope (Col 1:23), , Good News of God's promise of salvation (Eph 1:13, 3:6), Good News of peace with God and man (Eph 6:15) and Good News of immortality (2Tim 1:10). To believe in the Good News simply means to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God is the kind of God that Jesus has told us about, to believe that God so loves the world that He will make any sacrifice to bring us back to Himself. To believe in the "Good News" involves a total commitment – the investing of one's whole self in God without any guarantees or preconditions.

10. Jesus called them (and us) to be "fishers of men." I have come to the conclusion that there are basically four reasons why people do not catch fish:

- (1) Some people are using the wrong bait.
- (2) Some people are fishing in the wrong lake, that is, they don't know where the fish are.
- (3) Some people have got the right bait and they're in the right lake, but they don't know how to fish.
- (4) Then there are some people who have the right bait, and they're in the right lake, and they know how to fish but they're just not going fishing.

Jesus came not only that we might put our Faith in Him, but that we might go fishing with Him.

11. If we are to be fishers of men, what is our problem? You see, our problem is not that we have the wrong lake. The water is full of fish. The problem is not that we have the wrong bait. We have the Gospel which can hook any fish. **Our problem, I believe, is one of ignorance and apathy.** There are many Christians who believe they do not know how to share the Lord Jesus, and then there are many who just don't want to go.

12) Then we can have the greatest renewal: A few years ago Richard Cardinal Cushing wrote: "If all the sleeping folks will wake up, and all the lukewarm folks will fire up, and all the disgruntled folks will sweeten up, and all the discouraged folks will cheer up, and all the depressed folks will look up, and all the estranged folks will make up, and all the gossiping folks will shut up, and all the dry bones will shake up, and all the true soldiers will stand up, and all the Church members will pray up, and if the Savior of all will be lifted up . . . then we can have the greatest renewal this world has ever known. "

13. Isn't this what we are called to here at St. Boniface in Chandler?