

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homilist: Deacon Joe

Jan 21, 2018

One of the many amazing things about our life is how God calls to us. And what He calls us to do.

Let us start by looking at what happens in today's First Reading. The people of Nineveh, a metropolis in the ancient Middle East, are living sinful lives: lives full of pleasures and noise, and maybe even full of popularity and great achievements, but empty of meaning and lasting happiness.

God's heart is moved for those sinful people. Yes, He still loves them as He loves all sinful people. So, He calls upon the prophet, Jonah, to wake them up, to put them back on the path of God's plan for human happiness - the only plan that will truly work. But Jonah, although called would rather go to Tarsus than go to Nineveh. Jonah really, really did not want to go to Nineveh. Through Jonah, God went in search of the Ninevites, because he cared so deeply about their happiness. He wanted a personal relationship with them.

And the same thing happens in today's Gospel passage. In this passage, St. Mark shows Jesus doing what He came to earth to do: calling people into a personal relationship with God. That's really the core of what Christianity is all about. Notice how he calls his first Apostles by name - Peter, Andrew, James, John... He had met all these men before, as we read in John's Gospel, but now He calls them to follow Him more closely. He calls them, because he wants to give them more meaning, purpose, and, ultimately, happiness. He wants to bring them into His Kingdom.

This is what the God of Christianity, the one true God, is all about: He comes in search of every human heart, calling us into everlasting relationship with him. Yes, it is He who is pursuing us, first. Sometimes God calls us to make big changes in our lives, as He did with Jonah and as He did with His first disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

We can look to all of the saints whose life changed because they heard God's call: St. Anthony of Padua, Mother Theresa, Pope Saint John Paul II, and all the rest. And there may be some people whom you have not heard of - like Marcus Grodi [GROW-die], whose life changed because of God's call. He started out his professional life as an engineer. He was a strong Christian, but not a Catholic, and he soon decided to change careers and become a Protestant minister. Marcus continued listening to God's persistent call and eventually converted to Catholicism. He now has one of EWTN's most popular television shows, *The Journey Home*,

and he has helped hundreds, if not thousands, of searching souls to find and follow God's call in their lives. God continued calling him.

This past week, I was in Cheyenne and had the opportunity to visit and pray with a man who is being called in his life to make a big change, to endure suffering. A suffering so intense that it has derailed his ambitions and his efforts over many years to bring people to the church. He just cannot do it, anymore, his way. Kind of like Jonah. God has something else in mind for him. And so, we prayed about that.

All of us are being uniquely called by God. He has something to say to each one of us, every single day. What happened on the shores of Galilee happens to each one of us throughout our lives. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all living their normal lives, working to keep food on the table. So are you, Bill and Jim and Debra and Rueben. By all external signs, the Apostles were no different than any of their contemporaries. But then one day Jesus Christ walked into their midst and called them each by name. Jesus didn't see them as average people, generic fishermen. He saw each one in the revealing light of God's love. He knew that He had created them for an active role in his plan to redeem the human race and conquer the forces of sin and evil.

And just as Jesus invited each one of them to join His team and share His mission, so He does with us. He invites each one of us. He calls us by name. Some of us He calls to leave behind our nets, boats, and even our families, so that we can serve the Church full time, as priests, religious, and missionaries. Others he calls to be His ambassadors in the middle of our normal family and work life, redeeming the world from within, like leaven in the dough. He calls each one of us.

Today He will renew His call when He offers Himself to us in the Eucharist. He is calling us to respond to Him or to renew our response to that call in our hearts, to let our relationship with Him - truly become the most important thing for us, more important than our plans, pleasures, hopes, and comfort; because all those other things are just part of the "world in its present form," which, as St. Paul reminds us: "is passing away."

Listen to God's call, respond to His call and then live what He is calling you to do.