

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Third Sunday of Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying:
"Set out for the great city of Nineveh,
and announce to it the message that I will tell you."
So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh,
according to the LORD'S bidding.
Now Nineveh was an enormously large city;
it took three days to go through it.
Jonah began his journey through the city,
and had gone but a single day's walk announcing,
"Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, "
when the people of Nineveh believed God;
they proclaimed a fast
and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way,
he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them;
he did not carry it out.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (4a) Teach me your ways, O Lord.

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.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.

In your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice
and teaches the humble his way.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Reading 2

1 Cor 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.
From now on, let those having wives act as not having them,
those weeping as not weeping,
those rejoicing as not rejoicing,
those buying as not owning,
those using the world as not using it fully.
For the world in its present form is passing away.

Alleluia

Mk 1:15

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent and believe in the Gospel.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mk 1:14-20

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:
"This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel."

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea;
they were fishermen.
Jesus said to them,
"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."
Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.
He walked along a little farther
and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.
They too were in a boat mending their nets.
Then he called them.
So they left their father Zebedee in the boat
along with the hired men and followed him.

Exegesis

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

In Hebrew tradition the *Book of Jonah* is a *masal*, a parable. It is a story with a purpose and that purpose is to teach or reveal a moral or theological lesson. The story often involves our human relationship with God. In today's *masal* God is acting vis-à-vis, Jonah, the people on the ship, and the people of Nineveh, not to mention the fish and the animals in Nineveh.

The parable is a lesson in repentance. The theme of repentance runs through Sacred Scripture. The Israelite People seemed keenly aware of their own failings, their propensity to drift from God, to turn to idolatry and worldly cares. There seemed to be a constant call in the prophetic tradition to turn back or return to God. The Hebrew word *sub* was used to express the notion of turning back or returning to God. This was later translated into the Greek word *metanoia*. The word *metanoia* predates the Christian era. It means to change one's mind, typically out of regret for a particular decision or action. This word that we translate into English as *repentance* evolved throughout Sacred Scripture to mean more specifically to turn away from sin and turn back to God. Often it describes a situation of straying from God and then returning to God.

The etymology of the word *metanoia* I believe can take us deeper. The word is derived from two Greek words, *meta* which means to turn around, and *noia* which means mind or intellect. So, on this level it appears straight-forward, i.e. to change one's mind. The word *meta* can be found in a variety of circumstances relative to changing direction, for example the turning around marker in a race was called the meta. *Meta* was also used to describe something that is above or beyond. For example, the Greek word that we translate as *metaphysical* means beyond the physical, or beyond the physical senses, e.g. spiritual or supernatural reality. I would argue that, at its deepest level, *metanoia* is about going beyond the level of the mind to the level of the heart and soul. God is love and love requires a union of heart and soul. It is beyond mind and intellect. At its deepest level *metanoia* is about reconnecting to God, the source of love and mercy. That connection is at the level of the human heart and soul. Jonah never gets there.

Most scholars date the *Book of Jonah* to the early post exilic period. The Israelites have just endured decades of oppression from Babylon, Persia, and Hellenistic Kingdoms. Nineveh represents all that oppression in one sinful pagan city. Jonah is an Israelite. The Ninevites are his enemy. Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh to tell them to repent. If they do, God Himself, promises to repent of His intent to destroy them. Jonah does not want God to save them. At first Jonah runs from God, he goes in the opposite direction. In the belly of the whale, he comes to his senses, at least at the intellectual level, we hear his thoughts in his prayer. He realizes that he has disconnected himself from God the source of love and mercy. The whale does his job and spits him out on land, presumably where he started from, now facing Nineveh. God calls him the second time. He now begrudgingly does God's will and goes to Nineveh and encourages them to repent and they do. Afterwards he sits outside of the town hoping and praying that God will smote them anyway. The fact that God spares this sinful city makes no sense to Jonah, it is beyond his ability to understand, it surpasses human reason. In the story God repents, the pagan sailors repent, the whale repents, the Ninevites repent, the Ninevite animals repent. Jonah is the only character in this divine comedy who does not repent.

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Our psalm fits our theme of *metanoia*. We are a fallen people with our intellect and will tainted by the effects of original sin. We live in a society that is like a river pulling us downstream in the wrong direction. The psalmist recognized this reality thousands of years ago. As sinners we need the light of God to show us the way. We need His light, the light of Grace to be able to see the darkness and to distinguish darkness from light.

1 Cor 7:29-31

During the pontificate of Pope Paul VI there was one of those end-times prophecies. Someone asked the Pope, “Your excellency what should we do if Jesus comes tomorrow?” The Pope’s response was simply, “Look busy.” St. Paul spoke often of the immanent Parousia, the second coming of Jesus. There is a sense of urgency in his writings; today’s pericope is no exception. While in this world we live in *cronos* time with a beginning and an end date. For each of us we will meet Jesus face to face one day, whether it be at His Second Coming or at our death. Either way we do not know the day or the hour, so it is best to be prepared.

Mk 1:14-20

Our Gospel today captures the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Mark clearly transitions between John the Baptist and Jesus. Our translation begins “After John had been arrested.” This could be translated “handed over.” It is the same wording that Mark uses for Jesus in the Passion Narrative. John proclaimed the way and the Kingdom of God coming. Now the Kingdom of God and the Way have arrived in the person of Jesus.

The first words of Jesus as He begins His ministry are substantially the same in all three synoptic Gospels. “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.” The word for time is *kairos*. The Greek word *cronos* speaks of time as we tend to think of time, i.e. chronological time. Unfortunately, there is no good English translation for *kairos*. It has a connotation of being the correct or proper time. The mystics of our tradition often spoke of profound experiences of God where time seemed to stand still. I think that this is *kairos* time. Theologians speak of God as being outside of time, *cronos* time. I would argue that God lives in *kairos* time, the eternal present, eternal being.

The Kingdom of God in Mark and throughout the Gospels holds a tension between the present and the future. It is present now in Jesus and is evolving here on earth. In the parables Jesus often puts us as a part of the process of this evolution. Yet, at the same time this Kingdom is already fulfilled and awaits all who accept the Gospel, i.e. repent, and believe. Perhaps it is best to look at the Kingdom through God’s perspective, in *kairos* time. In any event, the Kingdom of God is now at hand in Jesus.

Jesus is immediately calling us to repentance and faith. (For a discussion on *metanoia* see above.) Jesus is calling us to believe in the Good News. We often equate faith with an intellectual ascent of the mind, articulated in the creed that we pray. The underlying word is *pistis* and is used throughout Sacred Scripture. It is translated as faith or belief or saving faith as in the miracle stories. The word generally suggests not simply intellectual conviction but also trust and personal commitment often with an orientation toward a threatening future.¹ As I reflect on the word, especially as it plays out in the Gospel of John, it seems to me that at its deepest level, faith is about opening ourselves to the indwelling Spirit of God. It is this oneness with God that is the goal of *metanoia*.

We are a part of God’s plan in this Kingdom that is still in process. Jesus begins His ministry by gathering disciples to Himself. This involves the invitation or call, the dropping of the nets and letting go, and the following, the beginning of a journey together with Jesus. The call requires that we are listening. It requires the exercise of our freewill. It elicits a response. Before we can turn toward, we must let go, drop our nets.

It was very common at the time of Jesus for a young man in his early teens to leave home and follow an itinerant preacher or holy man. If that did not happen it was customary for a young man to follow in his father’s footsteps to become an apprentice carpenter or fisherman, for example. The disciples called in our Gospel today were beyond their teen years and were fisherman in the family business. This was an unusual occurrence for them at this point in their lives. We would call these men late vocations today. It seems striking that they would so suddenly drop everything and follow Jesus. It was certainly culturally unacceptable for a man to leave his father so abruptly. It seems that a powerful force is at work here. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

1. The Gospel of Mark, Sacra Pagina, Harrington S.J. Ed.

Reflection

As we began Ordinary Time last weekend we heard the words of the young prophet Samuel, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” We know that Samuel did receive a message from the Lord, that the Lord was with Samuel, and that Samuel was obedient to the Lord and became His voice. We were not told, however, what the message was. It was a strong message for the priest Eli and for his sons and for the people. They had turned away from God and turned toward themselves and idolatry. God is warning the people through the Prophet Samuel, “You must turn to the Lord with all your hearts, and you must get rid of all the foreign gods...” (1 Sam 7:3)

The prophecy of Samuel is appropriately the message of our scripture this weekend. The message is repentance, “metanoia” in the Greek language. The prophet Jonah is given the task of going to Nineveh to preach the message of repentance. In the Gospel today we hear the first words of Jesus as He begins His public ministry, “... Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1:14) Metanoia means quite literally to turn around, or to turn back, i.e., to turn from evil and sin and to turn back to the Lord.

As I was praying with this scripture a few years ago I had a spiritual awakening. This time it came in the form of a deeper understanding of metanoia. Turning back to the Lord and opening our hearts to the Lord is just the beginning of repentance. The revelation came to me as I was reading the Book of Jonah.

In the first reading today, we are told that the word of God came to Jonah, and Jonah went to Nineveh. If you read the same passage in the bible it will say, “The word of God came to Jonah a **second** time;” (Jon 3:1). A few things happened in Jonah’s life since the word of God came to Jonah the second time! In fact, the first time God told Jonah the exact same thing. From where Jonah was standing Nineveh was directly east via land. In the next scene in the story Jonah is going due west by sea, the opposite of God’s will for him. There was a little storm, Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, they gladly obliged, Jonah spent a little time in the belly of a whale, etc. etc. From the belly of the whale Jonah prayed, and the heart of that prayer is this: “Those who worship worthless idols abandon (cut themselves off from) their source of mercy.” (Jon 2:9)

God is the source of all love and mercy. With the God given gift of freewill we have the ability to abandon, to turn away from, and to cut ourselves off from God, the source of all love and mercy. Repentance at its deepest level is the re-connecting with the source. It may begin with turning away from sin, turning back to the Lord with all our minds and hearts, but that is only the beginning. We must accept the gift. We must enter the source of love and mercy. When we come to the altar, we are called to enter the mystery, to enter the source of love and mercy, to enter the very life of God. Recall the Last Supper prayer of Jesus as they sat around the table, “Father may they be one as You and I are One. Nowhere in this world is this union more real, more substantial, more personal than the Communion that we share at Mass. To enter union with God, with our whole being, is true metanoia.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ,



Personal Witness

When I reflect on metanoia the parable of the *Prodigal Son* comes to mind. Jesus tells us this beautiful story to show us who God is. God is love and mercy and forgiveness. God is love and love must be free, or it would not be love. The two sons have everything. The younger son exercises his God given freedom and chooses to leave, to disconnect himself from his father and his love. He squanders everything and hits bottom. Like Jonah in the depth of the ocean, in the belly of the whale, he comes to his intellectual senses. Like Jonah we hear the thoughts of young prodigal. He makes an intellectual choice to get up and to return. Most people call this his moment of repentance, his metanoia. I do not.

As we listen to his thoughts, he has no expectation of his father taking him back as his son. He is dying of hunger and sees no other way to save himself. He has a story all rehearsed. He hopes that his father will accept him back as a hired hand; the hired hands have plenty to eat, and he is starving to death. He decides to return because he is hungry and has nowhere else to turn. He gets up and begins his journey back home. While he was still far off, we are told the father sees him coming and runs down the road to embrace him. It would have been shocking for the patriarch to show such a public expression of affection. It was against all the culturally accepted mores of the time. The son was shocked as well. He only gets a few words of his rehearsed speech out and he feels the embrace of his father's unconditional, unmerited love. He did not expect this. When the father's broken heart meets his empty heart metanoia happens. This is love beyond reason and intellect, beyond the mind. This is who God is, Jesus tells us!

When I begrudgingly attended a Cursillo weekend retreat 30 years ago I had no expectations. At the intellectual level I felt that I did not deserve God's love. Like the prodigal son I had drifted from God of my own choice. I had turned from God and was going in the wrong direction. What I did not realize was just how far I had drifted.

It was during the Saturday evening penance service that God allowed me to see the dark recesses of my heart. It was my *belly in the whale* experience, my *prodigal son* experience. Like Jonah and young prodigal, I was rehearsing my story for God. The more God melted the crust around my heart the darker things became. Then I started to experience something beyond words, beyond thought. It was a warmth and a light, it was the embrace of the Father's love. The light started to melt the darkness, and everything became clear and bright. It was beyond my wildest imagination. I did not expect that. My heart was changed forever in that moment of Grace. To this day I can't explain it, but it was the most real experience of my life. It was my metanoia moment!

