

Lectio Divina of 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – B (January 24/2021)

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, You have known us even before we were formed in the womb of our mothers and called us out of your tremendous love and called us by our name and made us part of your Trinitarian Family and partakers of the church, the mystical body of Your Son our Lord Jesus. You have given us gift of life, blessings, opportunities, faith and family bonds. You have walked with us every moment of our existence both good and bad. We are amazed, Father, Lord of the universe, that you attend to us and more cherish us. Create in us the faithfulness to love you in prayer and follow you in living your commandments, precepts and statutes. Father, You have called us to be lights in the world, reflecting the glory and light of Christ. We pray that we may become His reflection, so that everyone may see our good works and glorify you. In Jesus' sweet name. Amen.

1st Reading: A Reading from the book of Prophet 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.

The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Commentary: Today's first reading speaks about the mission of Prophet Jonah to the Ninevites. Nineveh was one of the most ancient cities of the world. It was the capital of the great Assyrian Empire for many years. The Assyrians fought with the Israelites and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 8th century B.C. (to be more precise, in 722–721 B.C). When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, He refused to go because he considered the people of Nineveh as enemies and unworthy people to receive the mercy of God. So instead of going to Nineveh, he boarded a ship heading towards the opposite direction. But God sent a great storm that his boat was about to sink in the sea. The pagan sailors prayed to their gods while Jonah was asleep. Finally the sailors cast lots to find out who was responsible for the storm. They came to know that they had the storm because of Jonah. He confessed his guilt of running away from the Lord so he asked the sailors to throw him overboard. When Jonah was thrown in the sea, a huge fish swallowed him and carried him on a three-day journey to Assyria where it spit him upon the shore. It is then Jonah

realized the Lord brought him purposely to Assyria when he was hesitating to go to Nineveh. This (second)time Jonah obeyed God and warned Nineveh of impending destruction. Contrary to Jonah's expectation the king and the entire city fasted and did penance. Seeing this conversion, God repented of the intention to destroy Nineveh. Jonah saved the pagan people through his ministry to them. God's mercy and saving love go beyond limits and borders. God's offer of salvation is for all despite the wickedness of people. He wants everyone to be saved. He wants everyone to come to the knowledge of truth and attain salvation. God chose Jonah as His instrument for the conversion and salvation of the Assyrians.

Responsorial Psalm 25: Teach me your ways O Lord

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.

Commentary: David in this psalm prays for God's guidance and pardon. He expresses his desire for guidance. How do we receive God's guidance? The first step is to want to be guided and to realize that God's primary guidance system is in His Word. Psalm 119 tells of the endless knowledge found in God's word. By reading it and constantly learning from it, we will gain the wisdom to perceive God's direction in our life. We are tempted to go in various directions for guidance though the influences of television, Advertisement, political parties, false teachings and so on but as children of God, let us remember that God teaches his ways through his word.

2nd Reading: a reading from the first letter of St. Paul to Corinthians 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.

The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Commentary: Paul urges us that we should live unhindered by the cares of this world because they are transitory and they are not the ultimate goals of our life. Therefore we should not get involved in transitory things that might keep us from doing God's work. While it is true that we have family commitments and responsibilities, they however should not distract us from our focus on Christ and his second coming.

Gospel Reading: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark 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.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ / Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Meditation: When Jesus began his public ministry, he said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel". These words were the core of Jesus' teaching: that the long awaited Messiah had come to break the power of sin and begin God's personal reign on earth. Most of the people who heard this message were poor and oppressed. Jesus' words were good news as they offered freedom, justice and peace. Many followed him. While Jesus himself was preaching repentance, he chose his disciples to do the same ministry that will continue after him. Even before Jesus' ascension into heaven, He said to his disciples, "Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). The disciples carried out the commandment of Jesus and brought the good news to the whole world. That is why St. Paul says that "the church has been built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets and Christ himself being the corner stone" (Gal 2:20). The growth and spread of the church is the toil and sacrifice of the apostles. We are grateful to God for the holy apostles, saints and martyrs who worked tirelessly for the church.

Hence Is it not beautiful to echo the words of prophet Isaiah 52:7 "How lovely are the feet of those who bring good news, announce peace and salvation! Look at the mission thirst of St. Paul in 1 Cor 9:16 "Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel". As baptized Christians, we should keep in our mind `to carry the mission of Jesus wherever and whenever possible necessary and in whatever form we can think of like prayer, mission, counseling, admonition, encouragement, financial support to the mission places and missionaries and so on and thus we participate in the mission of the church.

What is our Lord's message for us this week?

Prophet Jonah remains a hope for the hopeless. At times like prophet Jonah, we are frustrated with some people because of their wrong choices, excessive liberties and sinful lifestyle and we give up on them easily. But our Lord is not tired of them. He wants everyone to be saved, no one to be lost. He can do miracles in our life. He can turn a mess into a message, a test into a testimony, a trial into a triumph and victim into a victory. He only needs our willingness to do His mission for His people like Prophet Jonah, St. Paul and the first apostles. When St. Paul went to Corinth, he met with oppositions and he decided to leave the city. One night the Lord appeared him in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid, go on speaking, do not be silent. I will be with you. No one is going to attack or harm you for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10)

The church is a missionary by its very essence "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). The church is missionary by her very essence and therefore everyone of us is a missionary by the sacraments of baptism (lay people) and Holy orders (the clergy). God's call is not restricted only to a few for priestly and religious life. God's call is for everyone to live our Christian life. Hence let us exercise our priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry in our families, ministries, communities, neighborhoods and in our parish communities. When Isaiah (6:8) heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?" Isaiah said, "Here am I. Send me". The Lord sends us the same invitation through the weekend readings: Who will go for Us God and Our Church? What is our response? How are we going to respond? Amen.

Concluding prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for calling us to be loved and to love. To be shown mercy and to show mercy. To be forgiven and to forgive. To receive hope and to offer hope. To know joy and share joy. To feel peace and bring peace. To be made whole and offer wholeness. Merciful Jesus, You call us to follow; to turn away from our own selfish interests, and to take up our cross and follow after You, even if the path is difficult to see, or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves. Help us to respond to your glorious call with the eyes of faith, rather than from our own human point of view. Teach us to follow you and bear witness to you in our life and commitments without fear and compromise, knowing that You are always with us, leading the way. Amen. (Hail Mary and Priestly Blessing)