

Homily for the Third Sunday of the Year 2021

“Brothers, our time is growing short....I say this because the world as we know it is passing away.”

Each of today’s scripture readings strikes a note of urgency or at least elicits an immediate response.

Jonah preaches to the people of Nineveh: “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. We are told that 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 Gospel too strikes attention to the immediacy of the present moment: Jesus proclaimed; “The time has come,” He said “and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.”

Though we sense this urgent call it should not result in panic; not like the sense of fear and panic that results in the supermarket shelves being emptied of their contents.

No, this urgent call is a summons to Repent, and to believe the Good News. What is this Good News?

“Yes, God loved the world so much that He gave us His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved.”

It is a Call for us to allow God’s love and mercy to change our hearts and to desire more than anything to help others to discover this Good News for themselves. One of the children’s hymns has the line “become the Good News you have heard.” Repentance involves surrendering our lives to Christ so that like the grain of wheat that falls into the soil and dies, we too might yield a rich harvest for God.

In the Gospel of today’s Mass we cannot but notice the immediacy with which the first four followers of Jesus respond to His Call...”And at once they left their nets and followed Him.”

Although their initial response to Christ was full of enthusiasm, we also know from the Gospels that our Lord's disciples struggled at times with the demands of the Gospel; we see how they were slow to understand His ways; and quarrelled amongst themselves as to who was the greatest. Indeed, the evangelists do not hide from us the flaws of those first followers of Christ. However, it is also true to say that they also allowed God's mercy to touch their hearts and they too repented of their lack of faith.

There is that memorable passage at the end of the Bread of Life discourse in John Chapter 6. Our Lord had been teaching them of the reality of His Eucharistic presence; and many who heard Jesus would not accept what He had to say and they left Him.

Jesus said to the twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God."

We know from our own experience that, like the Apostles, we tend to wander off the path that leads to Life, and that we give up in seeking God's Way; hence the urgency of the Call to "Repent and believe the Good News."

Let us find refreshment and renewal from reading God's word and allowing it to shape our minds and hearts:

The psalmist prays: "Lord, make me know Your ways." The Rector of our seminary during my student days went on to become Bishop of Northampton. He chose as his motto the words of today's psalm: "Lord, make me know Your ways" as he felt that there was no more fitting prayer than the wholehearted endeavour to know God's ways. May this too become our burning desire as individuals and as a parish community: "Lord, make me know Your Ways."