

3 Sunday B

January 24, 2021

St. Patrick

The Scriptures for this Sunday begin rather harmlessly: **“The word of the Lord came to Jonah...”**

God *called* Jonah, just as Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John in today’s Gospel. And, yes, Jesus calls *each* of us as his disciples. Sometimes—no, *often*—the calling tastes sour, and, Friends, it may not turn out like we want it.

God called Jonah to preach repentance to that sprawling metropolis of Nineveh. You see, St. Patrick’s, that’s why Jonah ended up in the belly of the whale. He didn’t want to carry out that assignment God called him for.

For three days that whale had to take Tums for indigestion. Jonah had a rotten disposition, so foul that on the third day that whale had enough of Jonah. He vomited Jonah out of his mouth! (1)

Jonah didn’t want to do what God called him to do—that is, to go to those folks in Nineveh and tell them to shape up and get right with God. You see, Jonah couldn’t stand those Ninevites. He hated them and wanted them to get zapped by God.

Those people, the Ninevites, *they* were the ones who got Jonah boiling mad. God still called Jonah after his whale escape act, and nudging him on, Jonah went to Nineveh. As he made the journey, he kept checking his smart phone for job offerings. Once at Nineveh, his worst fear happened: Every one of those blankety-blank Ninevites shaped up and got on God’s good side.

Yes, God *called* Jonah. At the end of his mission, Jonah pleaded with God: **“Please, Lord, take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live”** (Jonah 4:3).

“Come follow me,” so Jesus beckons *us* as he did those first four disciples, **“and I will make you fishers of people.”**

In the turbulent 16th century, St. Teresa of Avila stands out. At the age of 39, she went through a deep conversion to Jesus and heeded his call to **“make her a fisher of people.”** Against a huge backlash, she labored to return the church to a true simplicity and as a school for prayer. She traveled extensively. The standard mode of transportation then was donkey carts. One time, on a journey, her cart

turned over, throwing Teresa of Avila into a muddy river. She grumbled against God about her ordeals, and she heard an interior voice assure her, “This is how I treat my friends.” And Teresa answered, “Yes, my Lord, and that is why you have so few of them” (2).

Twenty five years ago, in 1996, the Bishop assigned me to be pastor in two of the smallest parishes in West Tennessee—Lexington and Parsons, well more than 125 miles from here. I had never felt drawn to a small town, and I arrogantly figured I should have been assigned to a “prominent” parish. I was furious with the Bishop. On the evening of my first full day in the new parish, in the rectory I found myself sitting on the kitchen floor, weeping at how things had turned out, feeling so alone. When I had first arrived, taking exit 108 off of I-40 East, I prayed to God that I might love “those people.” Well, God answered the prayer in a different way. “Those people” loved me, and those four years have turned out to be the happiest in my life.

Yes, God calls each of us. Just don’t make it too syrupy. Jonah can vouch for that. And that whale still has some Tums’ tablets left which we’ll need if we try to follow how Jesus calls us. **“I will make you fishers of people.”** In ways we can’t imagine, Jesus wants to capture all of us in the net of God’s loving, eternal embrace (3).

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- (1) In these reflections on Jonah, I am indebted to John Kavanaugh, S.J., “Ambivalences of the Call,” in https://liturgy.slu.edu/3OrdB012421/the_word_kavanaugh.htm; as well as Frederick Buechner in *Peculiar Treasures* <http://www.frederickbuechner.co/peculiar-treasures-a-biblical-whos-who>.
 - (2) As quoted by Robert Ellsberg in *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: A Crossroad Book, 2001), pg. 450.
 - (3) Kavanaugh, *Ibid.*

General Intercessions

January 24, 2021

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Grace us that we might accept Jesus' call to be "fishers of people" and thus live out our faith vibrantly; we pray to you, O Lord—

As we come to the end of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, heal divisions among Christians, and make us one Body in Christ, bringing the good news to all the world; we pray to you, O Lord—

Deepen our reverence for all human life, so that we may reject capital punishment, direct abortion, and our proclivities to war and violence; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give healing to the sick, especially those with Covid-19; give protection to those who receive the vaccine; give support to all in the medical calling; and, give us all care in protecting others from the virus; we pray to you, O Lord—

Grant everlasting life to all who have died, especially Joe Simone, Antonio Blanche, Bobby Morris, and Nathan Ciaramitaro; we pray to you, O Lord--