

## January 21 III Sunday in Ordinary Time

God's call to discipleship, with the response of repentance, conversion, and renewal of life expected from each of us, is the main theme of today's readings. No matter to what life, work, or ministry God calls us, He first calls us to conversion, to reform, to repentance – to the process of continually becoming new people. Those who are constantly being reformed by the Spirit will be able to follow, as true disciples, wherever God leads. All three readings today underline the absolute necessity of such repentance and ready response to God's call.

The first reading tells us about the prophet Jonah, whose response when God first called him and told him to go to Nineveh was to take ship immediately for the furthest point he could get to in the opposite direction! Why? We don't know. Perhaps he was scared. Or perhaps it was because he hated the Gentile people of Nineveh and thought that they were not worthy of God's gracious mercy. In any case, Jonah ran away. God had to halt Jonah in his flight, then give him a three-day "time-out" in the belly of that great fish, before the prophet was ready to accept the Lord God's "second chance" to obey Him and go to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh. Far from being hostile, however, the people and the King of Nineveh, promptly responded to God's word as preached by His prophet, repenting in sackcloth with a fast -- just on the outside chance that the Lord God "might" spare them! In the second reading, Paul urges the community in Corinth, and us, to lose no time accepting the message of the Gospel because Jesus' second coming may occur at any time.

Today's Gospel describes how Jesus entered Galilee and began preaching. Like John, Jesus also called for repentance. But Jesus added the Good News that the Kingdom of God was at hand. It still is, for where Jesus is, there is the Kingdom of God. Then Jesus called on his listeners to believe in the Gospel or the Good News of God's love, mercy and salvation. When Jesus invited Simon, Andrew, James, and John to join him and help in his preaching and healing ministry, they promptly accepted his call, for discipleship is the only complete response a believer can make to that proclamation and invitation. The two greatest aspects of discipleship in Mark are being with Jesus and sharing in his mission. Disciples are invited to be with Jesus on a great spiritual journey and to share in Jesus' mission of proclaiming God's Kingdom in word and deed. In describing the call of Jesus' first

disciples, today's Gospel also emphasizes how we, sinners, are to respond to Him with total commitment, abandoning our accustomed attitudes and styles of life to follow Him in thought, word, and deed.

1) Let us appreciate our call to be Christ's disciples: Every one of us is called by God, both individually and collectively. The mission of preaching, teaching, and healing which Jesus began in Galilee is now the responsibility of the Church. Our own unique vocation and our relationship with the risen Lord are the same as that of the universal Church. Be we religious, priests, married or single people, we are all called, and in this call, we become what God wants us to be. The call, of course, begins with our Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation, is strengthened throughout the years with the Eucharist and Reconciliation, healed and consoled by Anointing, and (for those so called), made manifest in Matrimony, or Holy Orders. God is relentless in calling us back to Himself, even when we stray away from Him. Perhaps, God is asking us to see His hand in unexpected changes, reminding us that we are a pilgrim people who cannot be settled down into comfortable routine! Even when the changes are, apparently, not for the better, how we deal with them is what matters.

2) God is constantly calling each one of us to repent, to confess our sins, to do penance, and to amend our lives. I cannot receive communion if I have sinned mortally, without first confessing my sins and receiving absolution in the Sacrament of Penance (Confession). If I do receive communion while not in the state of grace, I have committed a sin of irreligion called a sacrilege which is a very serious offense against the 1st Commandment (CCC #2120). Is God calling me right now to respond to His call to repent by seeking out a priest and making a good confession?

3) Let us be thankful to God for His Divine grace of calling us to be members of the true Church. Let us make personal efforts to see in her the Light of Christ and to grow in holiness, learning the truths that are revealed through the Church and receiving her Sacraments. Let us be shining lights in the world as Christ was and make a personal effort to bring others to the truth and the light, so that they may rejoice with us in the Mystical Body of Christ, the invisible Kingdom of God.