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A message and a missiology

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Inherent to the life and growth of all believers is our awareness of the constant need for repentance. We repent daily and are thereby converted to Christ and the Gospel. Through our willingness to accept repentance and conversion as our graced lifestyle, believers become witnesses who invite others to draw nearer to God as well.

Although the power of his personal witness was questionable, the fictional Jonah (first reading) nevertheless was a medium of grace through which the Ninevites recognized their need for repentance and were saved. Jonah is represented as the epitome of Jewish bigotry and prejudice against foreigners. His mission proved successful not because of his own virtue, but by virtue of God's universal mercy. Jonah's story reminds contemporary believers in Jesus that, at times, the truth of the Gospel may be spoken through less-than-worthy preachers. It is the message rather than the medium that reaches out with grace and salvation.

Paul, unlike Jonah, was enthusiastically invested in the spiritual well-being of those whom he called to repent and believe in Jesus. By his word and by the good example of his own continuous turning to God, he inspired many in Corinth (second reading) and elsewhere to appropriate, by faith, God's gift of salvation.

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 25

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

Full text of the readings



When the Marcan Jesus (Gospel) recruited disciples to join him in his efforts

at preaching the message "Repent and believe in the Gospel," he also offered them a missiology. With his invitation, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of people," he called them to embrace repentance and faith as their way of life and then to extend the same blessing to others by word and example. Of all the images he could have chosen, Jesus chose the image of fishing. Obviously this was a profession familiar to those he called to follow him, but there are many good lessons that any disciple might learn from someone who fishes for a living.

Regardless of whether she fishes with a net or a pole, with lures or by chumming the waters, the fisher must go to where the fish are and offer them something that will entice them to take the bait. Disciples, too, can be more effective when they are willing to be mobile. Often this requires leaving the comfort of the institution to venture into those public and private places where people live their lives. Disciples have been entrusted with the "bait" of the good news, which becomes more attractive when it is paired with their own good example.

Another lesson disciples might learn from fishers is to work without discriminating as to the worthiness of others. There is no sign at the end of a fishing line that says, "Good fish only," nor can disciples have any prejudice as they follow their commission to tell the good news of salvation.

Fishers do not keep regular hours. Fish do not make appointments, so those who gather them must accommodate their "schedules." Preachers who allow themselves to be available to their congregations in a similar way can deepen the bond between themselves and the people in the pew.

Those who fish successfully are also persistent. They will bait the hook again and again, cast the line many times and lower the nets for as long as it takes for the fish to come. Along with their persistence, fishers have cultivated the art of waiting. Fishers of people are also called to be persistent in their efforts. As they preach, they will also learn to wait for the seed of that message to take root and grow in others. But even waiting can have significant value if the one who waits does more than twiddle his thumbs or criticize the sinner who is taking so long to change. More positive and productive is the one who fills her waiting with prayer and hope and trust that God's grace can eventually bring sinners to repentance and faith.

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