

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday, the Scriptures spoke of God's calling individuals to mission. Samuel was called to be a prophetic voice. Although Samuel was initially confused and thought it was Eli who was calling him, ultimately Samuel assents and says, "Speak, for your servant is listening." In John's Gospel, we read of the account of the calling of the first disciples. Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" Seeking a teacher or master, Jesus explicitly invites them saying, "Come, and you will see." Thus, they followed him and their apostolic zeal created a ripple effect and others began to follow as companions of Jesus.

Today, the readings call us to reflect on conversion of heart and repentance. The story of Jonah, the city of Nineveh and Jonah and the whale are very familiar to us. In this instance, the Lord calls Jonah to go to the great city and herald a call to conversion and repentance. In his commentary on the Book of Jonah, Anthony R. Ceresko, O.S.F.S, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* offers this insight: "In Jonah, the central human character in the book, the author draws not a stick figure nor a cardboard character but a real human being who, despite his obvious failings, manages to evoke a certain sympathy in his struggle to understand the God in whose service he finds himself. At the root of Jonah's sometimes inexplicable actions and acerbic disposition, one can begin to recognize a sincere striving to reconcile the concept of a just God with the reality of God's mercy. In inviting us to view the problem through the eyes of this reluctant prophet, the author brings us closer to the mystery of God."

When God first called Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah disobeyed and went instead to Tarshish. On the ship there, a violent storm ensued and the other passengers turned their anger and rebuke towards Jonah for disobeying God and causing this great storm. Jonah was swallowed up by whale and he stayed in its belly for three days and three nights. Jonah cried to God who heard his plea. Then, a second time, God called Jonah to get up and go to the city of Nineveh to convert that city. This time, Jonah obeyed. Nineveh was an unruly and teeming city; its inhabitants had strayed far from God. Yet, upon hearing the words of Jonah, they had a conversion of heart. They turned from their evil ways and God, in his infinite mercy and justice, spared them destruction. The Psalmist reminds us: "God is tender and compassionate, slow to anger most loving; his indignation does not last forever, his resentment exists a short time only; he never requites us as our guilt and sins deserve." [Psalm 103: 8-10].

One of the spiritual tools that helps us in our repentance and conversion of heart is detachment. Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Corinthians, reminds them to not be stuck entirely on the things of this world. We know from our own experience that what keeps us from having a more fulfilling and authentic relationship with Jesus is our preoccupations with worldly, secular matters. It is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the only thing that matters is what is right in front of us. Sometimes congruent with that sentiment is the pursuit of worldly things...thinking that our innate human hunger will be complete if we have pleasurable things to distract us from reflecting upon what truly makes us complete. In communicating this truth to the people of Corinth, Paul rather dramatically speaks of detaching oneself from families...sentiments such as weeping and rejoicing...buying material things and ownership...moving from being of the world to being in the world. The things of the world, as important and valuable as they might be, last only for a time. What endures forever for those who are fellowship with Jesus Christ is the gift of eternal life. As Saint Paul says, "For the world in its present form is passing away."

Mark's Gospel gives an account of the arrest of John the Baptist and Jesus proclaiming, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." Saint Paul, in his apostolic ministry, reflects the words of Jesus in the summons for a conversion of heart, realization that the kingdom of God is indeed close, and then actively responding to that reality by apostolic service, leaving all behind to follow Jesus. Pope Saint John Paul II, in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, offered an excellent reflection for us in light of today's Gospel. "If people are to have a share in this Kingdom, they must undergo an inner conversion and be ready to accept a new gift from God. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13, Lk 7:47-48); the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church."

May we continue to discern God's call for us, to listen to him when he calls to us, and follow wherever it is he may lead us. A heart free, open and generous to his call will take us places we could never have imagined. This sometimes takes a literal, physical form; but for most of us, this may simply entail a deeper awareness of God's promptings and thus a more profound relationship with him.

Next weekend, this column will be graced by the words and reflections of our Preschool Director, Jennifer Hunter, and our school principal, Marc Nava. We will be kicking off Catholic Schools Week, and I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity for the leaders of our parish educational ministries to speak with you via this venue. As I have said many times, I am so grateful to Jenn, Mark the faculty and staff of our preschool and elementary school for their dedication and selfless service to the Catholic education of our children and youth. May we continue to keep them as well as our parents, students and benefactors in our thoughts and prayers.

Fr. Tom