

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Wonder of God's Mercy

Today's first reading is taken from the middle of the story of Jonah. God had told Jonah to go to Nineveh and condemn them for their immorality. Nineveh was to the East of Israel. Jonah went to the West. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, one of Israel's enemies. Jonah was sure they wouldn't listen to him. They'd probably kill him. So Jonah went as far west as he could until he came to the sea. There he embarked on a boat to get even further away from Nineveh. You know the rest of this part of the story. A storm came up and the boat was about to sink. The sailors were sure that the storm had a divine origin. They wanted to know who had offended God. Then Jonah told them about God's call for him to go to Nineveh. They threw him overboard and a fish gobbled him up—a whale, most likely. Perhaps it was meant to be humorous, but nasty old Jonah was sour even to the whale's stomach. The whale spit him out on the land. So Jonah, now showing the result of being in the whale for three days, probably all grey and hairless, went onto to Nineveh. He prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed because the sins of the people. After only a day, the people from King to slave repented, fasting, putting on sack clothe and ashes. God saw their repentance and forgave them. Jonah became quite angry not that God was merciful, but that he, Jonah, had looked like a fool telling them that they were all going to die. The message here is that God is more concerned about the people's repentance than he is concerned about judging them for their sin.

Jesus Christ came to forgive sins. He did this through the sacrifice of the cross. He died for you and for me. He continues to forgive sins through the sacrifice of his Body, the Church. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. This Body heals and strengthens us when we are in the pain of sin. Just as the entire body hurts when one part is injured, stub your toe and you can feel the pain all the way up to your head, so also the entire body mobilizes itself to heal the injured part. We lie down when we have a physical pain so all our body's energy can be directed to healing.

At this time of year, many people will be joining pilgrimages to support life. Yes, the horrible Supreme Court decision to allow abortion in our country has been overturned by federal law, but there are many states and many people who are demanding the restoration of abortion. We continue to pray for an end to abortion. We also need to remember that there are people who come to Church who are reminded that they themselves were involved with an abortion. Some of them think that it is too late for them to be forgiven, or that the sin was too much to forgive. They think that they do not belong in Church. They think that other parishioners really would not want them there if they knew what they did. They are wrong. God wants them in Church. We need them in Church. God wants them because he wants them to receive healing from the community. We need them because we need people who will proclaim to the world that there is only one choice a Christian can make and that is the choice of life. We need them because they are hurting, and we, the Body of Christ, cannot bear to see any of our members in pain.

Some people come to Church battling sin and frequently losing that battle. They

might have gotten through a week or two, but then they succumb again. Once in Church they see so many around them living a moral life that they feel that they don't belong there. But they are wrong. They need to be there because they need to be in the presence of compassion and love, compassion and love emanating from Christ and reflected by the Catholic community. We need them there because we need to provide the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. They need to hear from us that it is not too late for them. They need to hear us recognize our own sins and proclaim that the Mercy of God is far more powerful than any of our sins. it is not too late for any of us.

Today's Gospel sums up all of Jesus' teaching. His message was simple: repent and believe in the Gospel, the Good News. The Good News is that if we are willing to fight against sin and turn to the Lord, happiness and peace will be ours. No one, no situation in life, nothing can destroy the joy that we have in being united to the Lord. The Good News is the wonder of God's merciful love.