

Little house of prayer - Week of Jan 22 – 28, 2012

III Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Believing in the conversion of the heart is trusting that it is God Himself Who changes our life”

1. The Word of God

Reading 1 – Jonah 3: 1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD'S bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, " when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

The Word of the Lord / Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 25: 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD, and your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way.

Reading 2 – 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

The Word of the Lord / Thanks be to God

Proclamation of the Holy Gospel according to Mark (Mar 1:14-20) +++ Glory to you, Lord

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord / Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

2. References for a better understanding of the Gospel

As we can see, today's Gospel is brief, but particularly substantial. First, because it condenses the central message that Jesus came to bring to the world: that the Kingdom of God is at hand, that to receive it, and enter in it, people must change and straighten their paths.

The message that John the Baptist announced was indeed the same, and many were the prophets who announced it before him, but now, it is God Himself Who comes to deliver it, and teach us the way with His own Life, Death and Resurrection. This is why He said: *“Repent and believe in the Good News...”* (Mark 1:15) He was the Good News, the Word made flesh.

“The Kingdom of God is at hand,” He tells us, and in today’s world, it is only natural that people will ask themselves different questions: How near is it? Close, to what? Close, to whom...? And, what is the Kingdom of God to begin with?

The Jews did not have that many questions; the message to them was much easier to understand, because in spite of their hardened hearts, and the human predisposition to sin, they lived in a religious society, whose members even greeted each other “in the name of God,” and waited for their Messiah. (Even though, many had a distorted idea about their Redeemer, as we have said in previous catechesis).

But in the atheist societies of our days, we must begin by clarifying what is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the empire of Justice, well-being in all its forms, of peace and, above all, of love... it is the victory of Truth and Good; that is why mankind must change, to embrace this Kingdom, and to enter in it. In reality, what is needed is for that Kingdom to penetrate, to pierce, to shake, to complete the transformation of each one of us. We will return to this topic later in the catechesis.

The Gospel continues with the story of Jesus calling His four apostles. Last week, we read what some consider “another version” of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, and a third apostle, perhaps John... But, if we pay careful attention to both texts (last and this week’s Gospel), we will notice that they are not at all incompatible, as in principle one might think. That is, that they are not necessarily two versions of a same fact, because they rather seem to tell about two different encounters...

In fact, it could very well have happened that, after the "first encounter" (the one in last week’s Gospel), the disciples returned to their usual occupations, that is, four returned to fish, and at least three of them continued their discipleship with John the Baptist.

The fact of the matter is that last week’s Gospel (taken from John 1:35-42) told us in verse 39 that the disciples “went and saw where he (Jesus) was staying, and spent **that day** with him...” However, this does not mean that they stayed with Him “since” that day, or every day ever since... As we say, they could have spent the day with Him, and then, they could have returned to their normal lives. We simply do not know.

However, what we can see is that the conditions were given, so that, at least three of them, would take Jesus as their Master, because John the Baptist had already been arrested by Herod (as we learned at the beginning of today’s Gospel.)

What we mean, and this is why we compare the two readings is, that it is very likely that Jesus had to go slowly, even with His first Apostles, to win their trust.

The personal history of many saints shows us that, the big conversion processes often experience "a second calling", a "second vocation", which is ultimately definite, radical, which is the turning point from where the fruits of the apostolic life mature and are harvested.

Today’s Gospel shows us, through the details, the radicalism of what may have been the “second step” for the four disciples... It tells us that Simon and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea, but when Jesus called them, they “immediately left their nets and followed Him.” Likewise, the sons of Zebedee left their father there, and followed the Lord.

It is possible that this radicalism will frighten us, or seems to us a bit “violent,” but it is an undeniable fact that those who accepted it, not only earned eternal life, but were also happy on this earth, because they began to live right here and then, the wonders of "The Kingdom."

We have many reasons to believe that the Lord is calling all the members of the ANE, to go through this radical

step, to take that "second step," to decide, once and for all, to follow Christ and the way to holiness. We know that He, His Church, and all humanity, need it.

All we have to do is, say "yes," but God knows how difficult it is for us, or better yet, how difficult it is for Him to get that "yes" from us.

Many are the personal, family and community needs that concern all of us: emotional, economic, social and even political needs (because we need laws that are consistent with the Gospel, and Christian leaders); but our primary need is of a SPIRITUAL nature: We need to be transformed, sanctified, because if we grow in holiness, everything will be happiness and peace, even if we continue materially needy... Even more: If the world had ten (let's not say ten thousand), only ten saints more, it would be a more wonderful place to millions of souls. LET US ASK GOD, WITH FAITH AND HOPE, TO MAKE US SAINTS.

REFLECTION OF OUR FOUNDING MOTHER IN RELATION TO THE GOSPEL:

Jesus will begin his public life after the announcement of John the Baptist: *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:15)

The basis has already been said by the precursor, and here, we are going to stop for a little bit, because the life of the Christian can very well be summarized in these two sentences, and if every Christian lived practicing these two announcements, our world would be a much better place.

Many people back then, as many people today, do not accept or believe in the Gospel. This is how, for many men, the Kingdom of God has not come, and neither has the acceptance of faith. There are too many shallow and broken lives because they have not taken the risk of experiencing the wonderful adventure of throwing themselves into the sea of trusting in God and in His Word.

Each person goes through life in a particular and exclusive way, because no two people or two lives are alike. The Lord can talk to us, whether through silence, or through the actions of our life. We only need to know how to listen to Him; believing in the force of life is to accept God, this is why any time is appropriate for a human being to review his life and rectify the paths he has walked.

Just as Jesus invited Simon and Andrew, and then the other Apostles to follow Him, giving them a mission much more noble, in which their spirits would find happiness, being fishers of men, that is: makers, builders of men. In the same way, the Lord calls us and places us in the right path to find true happiness and salvation, because that is what the Gospel is: an invitation, not an imposition, because no one can choose the happiness of the other, just as no one can force his neighbor to be saved.

When the Lord invites you to follow Him and carry His Cross (Luke 9:23-26), He is proposing that you close the curtain of the comedy of your life, of whatever you have dreamed in life, to give yourself entirely to Him. You are not giving your life to a cause, a system or an ideology, but to a Person: Jesus.

At the invitation of the King of Kings, you can walk away, as the rich youngster, and Christ will you see leave with sadness, or you can say "yes." This "yes" is in line with your baptism, with the "yes" of Virgin Mary and your oblation. This oblation will take you to follow Jesus wherever He goes, sharing His glorious death. But, verbally accepting to follow Christ is not enough, because in order to give yourself to Him, it is necessary to deny yourself. Only he who abandons things and the human beings he loves can take them in a free relationship of love.

The true love of Christ also means that you do not let yourself get wrapped up in the gifts or talents that God Himself has given you, saving them jealously for yourself, or using them just for your own enjoyment. I believe that it is a form of sin against the Holy Spirit, Who gave those gifts to you in the first place, if you do not use them as a means of uniting the Father with others, but to serve your own purposes. By doing this, you are not accepting that everything comes from God. On the other hand, if you accept the whole natural order, if you surrender all your aspirations to give yourself to Jesus, if you accept to be invaded by the grace of His Divinity, if you give up your own ideas and accept with gratitude anything unexpected from the Lord, this means that a true conversion – the kind that involves a total change in yourself, is taking place.

It is the Lord Who must purify you of the things that kept you prisoner. He purifies you of your tendency to attach yourself to your legitimate possessions, to things and to other people.

It is necessary for all of us to carry our daily cross; it is necessary that we go through that series of purifications throughout our lives, but we must be careful not to fabricate a cross in our personal workshop, but allowing Jesus to carry us with His Cross.

Courage, brothers and sisters! By accepting to lose your lives, you will save them. We only possess that to which we renounce...

3. Questions to lead the reflection (*Read each item slowly, and leave a moment of silence after each question to allow our brothers and sisters to reflect*):

- a) How do I respond to Jesus' invitation to convert more profoundly, and to believe in the Gospel? Do I believe in Him to the point that He is the fundamental model of my life?
- b) When the Lord asks something from me (whether through inspiration, because I "feel" that I must do it, or because He has shown me the needs of someone else; or even when He directly expresses a request through my Apostolate superiors), do I comply "immediately," as the 4 apostles did, or do I delay my response, or do I simply do not do it?
- c) Jesus invites us (Apostolate) to be fishers of men. How am I responding to that invitation?
- d) Did I leave my attachments completely behind to follow Jesus, or do I keep them hidden in some corner of my heart, so I can bring them out every now and then?

4. Comments from the brothers and sisters: *After a few moments of silence, the participants of the Little House of Prayer will be given time to speak, to express their opinions, reflections and comments. As always, we will seek everyone's participation.*

5. Concordances between the Holy Gospel and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Canons 1427, 4132, 1489, 2584, 1458)

1427 Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15) In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1432 The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart. (Ezekiel 36:26-27) Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!" (Lamentations 5:21) God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced: (John 19:37; Zechariah 12:10) Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.

1489 To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others.

2584 In their "one to one" encounters with God, the prophets draw light and strength for their mission. Their prayer is not flight from this unfaithful world, but rather attentiveness to The Word of God. At times their prayer is an argument or a complaint, but it is always an intercession that awaits and prepares for the intervention of the Savior God, the Lord of history.

1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. (Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988). Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful (Luke 6:36): Whoever confesses his sins . . . is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are,

so to speak, two realities: when you hear "man"—this is what God has made; when you hear "sinner"—this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made. . . . When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light. (St. Augustine In Jo. ev. 12, 13).

6. Reflection with the Great Crusade

CL 177 – Jesus. I, the Lord of the universe, do not deny anyone My Mercy, even if that person lives in the most remote place of My Empire. I know everyone; I know each secret in your heart. Then, do not be surprised that people hear words of mercy. In truth I tell you: if you do not convert, you will feel the rigor of justice.

CL 29 – Jesus. Once the part of My life that was to be carried out in union with John was fulfilled, then My life was directed towards Andrew, Peter, James, John and the others. I did not wish to have those who were corrupted by the spirit of the Synagogue close to Me, because I had to do everything outside of it. What help could I have obtained from so many haughty persons? I began to work precisely where simplicity was the norm, always shunning the souls of the arrogant. For catching human beings, it is not so necessary for them to be cultured as for them to love Me. And it is certainly true that the greatest obstacles to the expansion of My Kingdom are to be found where there is greater culture accompanied with or without My grace. How fortunate were Peter, Andrew and all My holy Apostles! Fortunate because they were familiar with divine knowledge while being ignorant in human knowledge. And while I do not condemn exercising the mind when it is devoted to a good intellectual cause, it pains Me that this gift is often used to cause My work to crumble and to ridicule My Church.

My Beloved Apostles! They were all My beloved. I loved them all and I still love them all, even if now one of them, in Satan's clutches, continues to hate Me. That is why, during My mortal life I prayed a great deal for them; I watched over their souls. I taught them like a mother teaches her young. Fortunate are those who know how to imitate them, who wish to be taught by Me, who do not refuse My love, and who leave their affairs to follow Me! Fortunate because they will find Me filled with understanding, concern and joy! Will I have to be content with lukewarm followers, disheartened souls and few, very few who believe in My great longing for your good? When I speak of My Apostles from that time, I think about you, My present Apostles. All have been granted a share with Me because in each one of the twelve I saw the multitude that were to follow them, and, for that reason, with infinite fondness, I loved those whom I had chosen.

7. Final Comments or Questions: *Once again, the participants will be given time to speak briefly about the excerpts from the Catechism, the Great Crusade or any other topic of interest to the House of Prayer, the Apostolate or the Church in general.*

8. Virtue of the Month: This month, we will practice the virtue of Fortitude (Catechism of the Catholic Church – Canons 1808-1811-1831-1837)

This week, we will meditate upon Canon 1837, which textually says:

1837 Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

And the Great Crusade tells us: CM 79 – Jesus

The first and most essential virtue is Love. Where it reigns, every other virtue flourishes, because from it, chastity, humility, fortitude, justice etc. await continuous nourishment. It would be good to cultivate the tallest plant in order to have the other small plants. On the other hand, it is a gross error to cultivate the smallest plants and forget the tall one.

9. Weekly purposes

In relation to the Gospel: I will take special care of my personal testimony of life, to make it an example of

conversion within my family and community.

In relation to this month's virtue: I will offer my daily work to the Lord, particularly, what I do for the Apostolate; I will ask Him to give me the strength to accomplish my duties, and deliver me from the temptation of not doing a good job or abandoning the task before it is finished.

Note: You must have noticed that, ever since Advent, we have been having the reflections of our Founding Mother, to enrich the catechesis of our Houses of Prayer...

Even if this is not a permanent thing, may God grant that we can continue to enjoy this gift, as often as possible. Let us also pray that the Lord will grant good health to her, and to our Founding Father, and bless all their projects, as they always pray for each one of us.

United in prayer, we send, as always, our regards with brotherly affection.