

CATHOLIC DISTANCE UNIVERSITY

Homily for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday, January 22, 2012

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Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 25:4-9

I Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

Today's readings are about us changing our behavior. When the purity of God comes into the world to offer us a life with him then we have to change. As Pope Benedict XVI explains: "For Christians, truth has a name: God. And goodness has a face: Jesus Christ." This infinite goodness meets us where we are in this world and then asks us to grow through grace to become good enough and true enough for company with God. God's grace is far more than human sin. Unfortunately the road of grace is not often tried. Our culture has something against saints and yet being saints is what we genuinely should aim for.

So already on this Third Sunday of the year we hear a basic, basic point that we need to grasp if we are going to follow Christ all of the way into Heaven. The point is that we need to change, we need to grow in grace.

Now the *First Reading* tells us the story of Jonah the Prophet. Jonah was given a message and the city of Nineveh responded. He told them to repent and they did. Consequently: "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." This is important. God is not vindictive, punishing people for no reason. God passionately loves his creation. But he has given us free will and we can choose evil. Many people do. Even the ancient pagan Ninevites got the message and repented.

In that spirit, we sing: "Teach me your ways, O Lord," in the *Responsorial Psalm*. We know in our heart of hearts that the Lord's ways are the ways to the best possible kind of life. There is a lot more than we can handle here. But for example, the psalmist says—and we do too!—"Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior." He knows that God is not vindictive, God is his savior and so God has the right intention as he offers his guidance.

In the *Second Reading*, Saint Paul emphasizes another aspect of our need to change and that is that we do not have unlimited time to do it in: "I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out." This is not a cheap trick. Paul knows that each of us will eventually die and the world will eventually end. The end will

be unexpected. So we don't just hope that the end does not come soon. That would be like driving too fast – eventually it will catch up with us.

Now comes the challenging part. Paul goes on: “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.” He is trying to sketch for us the world view of the Christian, the way that a Christian behaves. One reason that he can ask for this kind of behavior from the people of Corinth (in a way he is their bishop) is that God has given each of them so much. So the earthly things, even earthly pleasures take second place. But the reason that he emphasizes is that: “For the world in its present form is passing away.” Here is something else that we do not easily accept. What he is saying is that the effects of Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection have totally changed reality as we know it. God is bringing time to its end. With Christ's coming there is no longer anything further to expect. The world (the old creation) is gradually changing into the new creation. When that happens, our time will be up. Our time to change our behavior and live as the followers of Christ that we claim to be will end.

Now we can see why Jesus says in the *Gospel*: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” This call to repent is about changing for the better. Of course this appeal is mostly wasted. Most Catholics won't change. But the door is closing.

Then we are told of the call of Simon and Andrew. They drop everything when they hear Jesus' call. Do we have the courage to do the same? Our baptism is not enough. Going to the sacraments is not enough. We personally have to commit to change our behavior so as to become different persons, persons in Christ.