

Commentary on the Readings for January 21, 2024

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

The theme of the readings for this Sunday is appropriate for the beginning of a new year and falls somewhat in line with other New Year's resolutions; but hopefully, we can keep this one. It is the invitation by Jesus in the Gospel to "repent and believe in the Gospel." However, this is not a "new" resolution. It was voiced by Jonah (in the first reading) and continued by all of the gospel writers, and St. Paul, as we shall see.

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of the Prophet Jonah (3:1-5, 10)*. Here we have the familiar story of Jonah (minus the first story) who is commanded by God to preach to the people of Nineveh a message of repentance for their sinful ways. Now, repentance is not the same as penance. Repentance is the intentional decision to turn from evil and all things that could lead us to evil. Penance is our expression of sorrow or contrition and some outward sign of making up for past sinful deeds. So, the Ninevites got the message. They repented and did penance and they were saved.

In the Responsorial Psalm (25:4-9) is a prayer that the Ninevites might have prayed when asking for forgiveness, but they were not Jews and probably did not know the psalms. However, we all know the moral law written on our hearts and should need little prompting to turn from evil. This psalm is a brief prayer that we could all say daily begging God for help in obedience.

The **Second Reading** is from **St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (7:29-31)**. In this letter, Paul is being somewhat extreme in telling us to renounce the ways of the world, but in his day the only way to emphasize a point was to repeat or exaggerate. So, ladies, do not be offended by St. Paul's statement. He really is addressing everyone to go to whatever extreme it takes to turn from evil because we never know when we will run out of the opportunity to do so.

The **Gospel Reading is Luke (2:2-40)**. The message of Jonah and Paul above are summed up and repeated here by Jesus in His call to Andrew, Peter, James and John (and to you and me) to join Him in preaching the same message that God asked Jonah to preach. So why is this so important? The call to repent and reform our lives is a universal call to open our mind and heart to listen to the voice of God in Jesus Christ. God wants us to turn away from the ways of the world because, as we have seen lately, the secular world is turning away from Him and that leads to much of the unhappiness in the world and possibly to spiritual death.

If we fail to keep our spiritual eyes focused on Jesus and His teachings, we would be like those disciples who turned away from Him in **John's Gospel (6:66-69)**. Jesus asked His remaining disciples "Are you going to turn away from me also?" Peter's reply should be ours: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." This challenges us to ask the question, **"What spiritual resolutions are we going to make at the beginning of this New Year?"**

Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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