

Heed God's call to reform

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 26): (R3) Mark 1:14-20; (R1) John 3:1-5,10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

The key word in Sunday's readings is "call." To get a call from someone important to do something important elates us, doesn't it? Yet God is always calling us.

In the first reading next Sunday, God calls Israel's ancient enemy, the Assyrians, to repentance. In the Gospel God issues two calls. First, a call to everyone — "Reform your lives and believe in the good news!" Secondly, a call to four special people: Simon and Andrew, James and John — "Come after me; I will make you fishers of men."

The focus of the readings, however, is not so much on the call as on the response to the call. Some respond and some do not. The most unlikely, like the Assyrian Ninevites, respond; whereas the most likely, like the Jews, do not respond.

The Jonah parable is a beautiful story. God inspired this parable to teach us one point: He wills the salvation of all people, even though they be evil, cruel and hated by all as were the Assyrians.

Historically, God never sent a prophet to a pagan nation. But as our Lord tried to shock Israel out of her smugness by making a Samaritan, so hated by the Jews, the hero of the parable of the Good Samaritan, so in the Jonah story, by offering salvation to the Ninevites, God tried to snap Israel out of her smug exclusivism — out of her thinking that salvation was hers alone.

The parable of Jonah is a really humorous story, full of irony and satire.



Father **Albert Shamon**

A word for Sunday

The only historical thing about it is the name of the prophet Jonah. Jonah lived in the eighth century B.C., whereas the story was written sometime between the end of the Babylonian exile in 536 B.C. and before 400 B.C.

When the Jews had come back from their exile in Babylon around 536 B.C., they found that pagans had settled in Israel and intermarried with the remnant of Jews who had not been taken into exile. This remnant began to absorb a bit of paganism, to the great detriment of their Judaic religion.

In this crisis God raised up Nehemiah, who went around breaking up these mixed marriages. As a result of this cleansing movement, many of the Jews got the idea that God was their particular possession and that he had no interest in other people. The response shows how unsound was this conclusion: "Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way." That was the lesson the Jonah story was meant to teach: God wills the salvation of all.

The Gospel shows Jesus as one greater than Jonah. "Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming God's good news." And what is the good news? It is this: God is the God of all; he wills

not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live; he came not to condemn the world, but to save it. Thus the prophet Joel urged his people: "Return to the Lord with your whole heart. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness and relenting in punishment" (Joel 2:12-13).

Pagans of old pictured God as a God of threats, not one of promises; a demanding God, not one ready to give more than to ask. The "good news" is that ancient man's concept of God is all wrong. God is a father — one who loves us so much that he invites us to be his friends. The good news is an invitation to us to become friends with God!

Our response should be to do as Jesus asked: "Reform your lives."

For some people, reform means getting rid of a bad habit, like swearing, excessive drinking, premarital sex, contraceptive practices, masturbation, gossiping, being unkind, being mean, being impatient with others. That is good.

Once a priest gave a sermon on "quitting." After Mass, as people were filing out of church, the priest asked a lady what she planned on quitting. She answered, "I ain't been doin' nothin' and I'm goin' to quit that

Daily Readings

Monday, January 27
Hebrews 9:15, 24-28;
Psalms 98:1-6; Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday, January 28
Hebrews 10:1-10; Psalms 40:2,
4, 7-8, 10-11; Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday, January 29
Hebrews 10:11-18; Psalms
110:1-4; Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 30
Hebrews 10:19-25; Psalms
24:1-4AB, 5-6; Mark 4:21-25

Friday, January 31
Hebrews 10:32-39; Psalms
37:3-6, 23-24, 39-40;
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday, February 1
Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19; (Ps)
Luke 1:69-75; Mark 4:35-41

too."

Most of us, like that woman, could quit doin' nothin', and begin doin' somethin'. For instance, go to Mass once or twice a week, go to monthly confession, pray the rosary daily. That would be a good start. Do somethin'!

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

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