

JMJ

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B – 2021

Only with the help of God's grace! It was so for the people of Nineveh, and it was so for Simon, Andrew, James, and John. It was God's grace that got them to do something different.

Jonah didn't want the people of Nineveh to repent. He wanted them to die in their sins. But God used Jonah's words to inspire true repentance in their hearts. Jonah hadn't gone but a third of the way through that evil city when all of the people, from the king right on down to the cattle, put on sackcloth and ashes. God's grace is very powerful. And what God inspires, He'll see through to completion – if we're faithful. Even when it seems impossible.

Can we change? Yes. Can we change others? Yes, with the help of God's grace – but we've got to be faithful; we've got to do our part. We've got to say what God wants us to say, and to do what God wants us to do. Which means that we've got to know what God wants.

What *does* God want?

Every morning I pray a prayer called the Morning Offering. In it I offer everything I do and say for the praise of God's name and “all the desires” of His Sacred Heart. What *are* desires of His Sacred Heart? The first two things listed in that prayer are “reparation for sin” and the “conversion of sinners.”

It's not hard to see why those are the two things God wants the most. They're the two things He laid down His life on the Cross for: in reparation for sin and the conversion of sinners. And that's what the Gospel today tells us were the first words of His public preaching. "Repent, reform your lives," He said.

And when He called His first Apostles, what did He say He would make them? Fishers of men – to save souls. That's why He came. God thinks that's the most important thing of all, the salvation of souls.

Sometimes, though, we don't seem to put a lot of stock in that, especially when we're afraid to say something that needs to be said. It's then that we have to remember that God's grace will be there to help us know what to say and when to say it.

When I was a child I learned that the soul I had to try the hardest to save was my own. It's true for all of us. We have to be alert to our *own* weakness and, in that regard, to be authentically humble and not like that self-righteous Pharisee who thanked God for not making him like the rest of men, a poor sinner. We're *all* sinners!

However, we'd put our own salvation in serious jeopardy if we weren't also deeply concerned about the salvation of others. A non-practicing spouse, a child who's gone over to atheism, a cohabiting friend, an adulterous relative. I'll bet there aren't many of us here today who can't think of someone like that in our own family, or among our friends and acquaintances.

So, what are we going to do about it? On the one hand, we don't want to be butt-in-skis. But, on the other, we can't pretend that we haven't got responsibility for the salvation of their souls.

So, here are five things I'd like you to remember. Number One, trust in the help of God's grace. He's even more interested in their salvation than we are.

Number Two, straighten up our own lives. How can we ask someone else to be good if we're not willing to be good ourselves?

Number Three, bring the situation to God in sincere fasting and prayer; so that, before talking to others about God, we talk first to God about the others. He can move mountains.

Number Four, we stand a much greater chance of success if the people we're trying to convert know – for an absolute fact – that we love them. As they say in Cursillo: "Make a friend, be a friend; and then, on the basis of that solid friendship, bring a friend to Christ."

And Number Five, remember that Christ called His Apostles and us to *join Him* in being fishers of men. We'll never go fishing like this without our Divine Fishing Buddy. He's got a huge tackle box, with a special fly for every person there is. I don't know much about fishing except that it often requires a lot of patience and keeping the volume down. Too much shouting can scare the fish away. Remember, it's the Lord's work. He's just asking our help, and He'll let us know when it's time to give a little tug on the line.

Can we change? Yes. Can we help others change? Yes. Yes, we can – *with the help of God's grace.*