

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#)

[Reading II: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)

[Gospel: Mark 1:14-20](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/012124.cfm>



The first reading and the gospel passage both focus on conversion. Conversion has many nuances in our society. In economic terms, a conversion of currency is used to describe exchanging paper currency from one country into another's money as in exchanging pounds into dollars. It can be used to express new understanding or to change one's mind – I thought this, but now I believe that. Some speak about changing from one Christian church to another as a conversion.

The biblical word has a different focus. The Greek word used in the New Testament is *metanoia*. *Metanoia* (repent) is about change. It is to change the direction of one's life, to change behavior, or to change the values and priorities in one's life. It is not merely a change in ideas. It is a redirection of one's life with new values and goals.

When a person moves from not following Jesus, whether, from no religion or a non-Christian religion, one enters a new way of life as one places God at the center of one's life, one's choices, and one's priorities. Jesus offers not just facts about God nor rules from God, but a relationship with God and a life that reflects God's love. When one decides to be involved in a relationship or head in a new direction, there are many consequences. Jesus shows the contrast in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel for those who wish to be his disciples.

"You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world."

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? (Matthew 5) These are all challenging messages and none of us fulfills them completely. Only with God's help are we able to move forward and love in the way that God does. We are continually being converted and becoming new creations. Each day is a new opportunity to be more fully converted.

In the Gospel passage for today, Mark presents Jesus' call of the disciples to leave their work and become disciples. This meant giving up the security of what they had known and becoming part of a community where they relied upon each other and supported one another. It meant giving up control and following Jesus wherever he led them. It means adopting a whole new life with different principles, different values, and different actions. This is evident in the lives of those who become Christians in many third-world nations.

This radical change is shown in the ministry of the prophet Jonah. Although he was reluctant initially, he called the Ninevites to repentance. His message was heard and accepted overwhelmingly. Everyone repented, as shown by the wearing of sackcloth. (It is the rough and uncomfortable cloth used to carry grain and other materials. It is often

the only cloth available to the poor.) It was a sign of humility. They came before God expressing their poverty and their need for God's mercy and help.

As Americans, we can easily slip into an individualism that is fed by our egos. The focus is upon us. Jesus calls us to be part of the reign of God that invites us to seek the common good. Just a couple getting married needs to move from their individual plans and develop a "we" plan, so God calls us to solidarity with our sisters and brothers in discipleship. We can place our trust in money, power, possessions, fame, beauty, strength, or many other things. Jesus invites us to place our trust in God and journey as a community of disciples toward the full realization of God's reign.

The second reading calls us to have a long-term perspective. Everything that we now have, health, looks, position, and possessions, will all come to an end one day. The ability to recognize what is essential requires holy detachment. It enables us to see what is worthwhile in life and what will be of a true benefit to us. Many of the things that we prize and recognize as important now have a short-term benefit. They have a value and a role to play, like whether we get an A or B in a class, have a good credit score, or get exercise. Yet these and most other things are short-term concerns. Our ultimate goal is a relationship with God. All the other things need to be evaluated on whether they will strengthen or impede our relations with God or our service to God. It challenges us to see everything in our life as a means rather than a goal. Only union with God is the goal of a disciple.

Themes:

Reign of God
Call of Disciples

Conversion
Acceptance of and Believing the Gospel

Reflection Questions:

Think of a time when you made a significant change in your life:
What was your life before this? What prompted or brought about the change?
What obstacles did you face? What support did you have?
What was the turning point for you to act on the change? What is your life like now?
What are some of your current concerns or goals?
How do they impact being a disciple of Jesus?
What is the difference between having an intellectual belief in Jesus and having a relationship with Jesus?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may recognize that the reign of God has begun and make all our activities signs of our Christian discipleship

For a spirit of holy detachment: that we may seek first the reign of God and place ourselves, our relationships, and our possessions in the service of God

For all who are alienated or disconnected from God: that the Spirit will spark a new flame of faith in their hearts and open them to a new relationship with God

For all who desire a new direction in life: