

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily  
Sunday, January 21, 2024  
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Cycle B

This week's readings focus on the theme of call. Our first reading briefly recounts the call of Jonah. Jonah is one of the most beloved Old Testament prophets. Why? Perhaps because of the fascinating story of him being swallowed by a whale. This image lends intrigue to one's imagination and is somewhat fairytale-like. It is a good story and a fun story!

However, we must not forget why Jonah was "swallowed by the whale". He refused to journey to Nineveh to preach repentance to the people there as God has instructed him. He sought to escape by sailing in the opposite direction. Jonah heard God call him to a particular mission in life and he ran as fast as he could the other way.

He did all he could to avoid his calling. But God was relentless. In the end, God won and Jonah went to Nineveh to preach. The best part is that the people of Nineveh listened to him and changed their lives! Jonah's preaching was, in the end, a great success.

John Paul Thomas has an interesting take on this story: *"Imagine what would have happened if Jonah would have just listened to God from the very beginning". "It may have left us with much less of that fairytale-like story but it certainly would have saved Jonah and others a great amount of stress. He would not have had to endure the great storm at sea, the wrath of the crew on that ship, the distress of being thrown over the boat and the experience of being held captive in the belly of the whale for those three days. All this could have been avoided if he would have just listened to God from the very beginning"*.

Having said that, it is also interesting and insightful to look at the story from another perspective. The truth is that Jonah did endure all of these difficulties. And though we may be tempted to judge him for that and shake our finger at him, we may want to be careful.

Why? Because, as John Paul Thomas comments, it is entirely possible that God actually allowed him, by an act of his divine permissive will, to go through these struggles for a reason.

It might have been the plan of God all along. In other words, it is entirely possible, and perhaps probable, that it was part of the wisdom of God that Jonah, at first, resisted his will and rejected his call. Why would God do this? Most likely for our sake in that Jonah becomes a great example for us.

One of the lessons of Jonah's life is this: God is relentless in his love for us and is relentless in calling us to embrace His will. So, Jonah's life and actions become prophetic and teach us a great lesson. God does not give up on us. He does not simply throw us away the moment we turn and run away from him. Instead, our denial of him only makes his resolve to pursue us all the greater and more intensely. He takes our weakness and brokenness, our lack of resolve and commitment, our reluctance and refusal, our faults and failures, and uses them for His glory and his perfect plan.

We all have our own calling to glorify God in whatever kind of life we live in. This is the very purpose of our life as followers of our Lord. As His word echoed in our Gospel today, **“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men”**.