

Proclamation of the Gospel

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit.

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark.
Glory to You O Lord.

After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming God's Good News:
"This is a time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the Good News."

As he made His way along the Sea of Galilee, he observed Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting their nets into the sea; for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately abandoned their nets and became His followers. Proceeding a little further along He caught sight of James, Zebedee's son, and his brother John. They too were in their boat putting their nets in order. He summoned them on the spot and they abandoned their father Zebedee who was in the boat with the hired men and they went off in his company.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily by Fr. Gerry Hurley

What an eclectic collection of readings for today. Yeah? (yes) Yeah. Amen! Man, something to deal with. We have the first one — the prophet Jonah — You all know about Jonah? (yes) And the rest of you? You've heard of him, right? (yes) You know a lot about Jonah. Jonah, you know, we learned from those great stories because the rich symbolism in the telling of all of this is powerful. Jonah was your everyday kind of man. Right? Yeah he was. He was. He was your everyday kind of man. He had the same problems that you and I have.

There were people he didn't like. Right? Do you have that trouble? Good. Good to be aware of, and Jonah was keenly aware of it because the Ninevites, they had attacked his people rather often. And, uh, now the Lord is trying to get Jonah's attention. He said, "Hey, Jonah, my friend, I have a little assignment for you." And Jonah said, "God, haha, no." He said, "You've got the wrong man." And God said, "No, no, Jonah. I don't. I don't make those kinds of mistakes. I have a real plan for you, a purpose." And Jonah said, "No, no, no, no." He said, "No, not me." He said, "You're gonna go to the Ninevites and you're gonna preach the Good News to them." And he said, "No, no, not into that country." So, he took a little dive into the sea instead, right? He was little more complex. He went ahead and wanted to get away from God.

But it's really hard to get away from God. You know, the "Hound of Heaven" — that great Irish author. The Hound of Heaven — God. God really wants us. God is seeking us so much more than we are Him. God will bring about as He indeed ordains.

And so, Jonah takes his little trip on the boat. He's on the boat, and the rich symbolism again. You know, Jonah is lying up there in the hull of the boat, and the captain is going crazy saying, "Man, we are

in this storm. We are going to have to cast off some of our stuff, and get rid of some of our cargo because we're not gonna make it. And then He finds Jonah, and he says, "What are you doing?" And, Jonah says, "Hey, I'm really a part of the problem," he said. "I'm on board because I'm running away from God." He said, "What you need to do is get rid of me. Throw me overboard and you all will be OK."

Remember Jesus being in the hull of the boat, and the great turbulence on the sea, and they come to Him and they say, "What are You doing? What are You doing up here? Man, we are terrorized and You're up here having a little nap." And so, they take Jonah and throw him overboard and man he is swallowed up in the belly of the whale or the whale of the belly or whatever it is — you know the big fish, and we know all of the drama. We can get bogged down in was it a whale, or was it this and this. Hey, he was cast very significant — three days and three nights. Man, how important was that — in the darkness, in the bowels of the earth. And, he comes out of it anew. He comes out of it totally renewed.

Remember the three days of the Christ that we will encounter later? Man, the experience of dying. And so he dies to some of his own self and some of his own struggle in that experience. Now, he is cast out, and the Reading picks up and the Word of the Lord came to Jonah saying, "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announced the message that I'm going to tell you." The message — and so he arrives in Nineveh. Now, he has a great dislike for these people and he must have some sense of gaudium in his heart as he goes around preaching the good news for God. He is saying, "Okay God, I'll do it, but I want You to know I'm doing it under pressure, under a little resistance — not something I want to do, because I know these people. And you and I together know God that they're not going to repent anyway."

He had it figured out pretty good. And so he starts preaching. Man, was he surprised when he hears the message — the King has issued a decree: we are all going to repent and we are all going to return, and we're going to put on sackcloth and ashes, and we been spend 40 days of Lent preparing. Wow, he was the most surprised man in the world. He had to be saying, "God, why did you do that? Why didn't You give them their 'come-uppance?'" Right? Why didn't You give them what they deserve?" Because we like to do that too. God, I'd rather you meat out some stuff to them, and let them know who's boss. God is saying, "Sorry my friend. That's not the way that we do business in the Kingdom."

So, a great story, a great teaching. It's the story of somebody really becoming a disciple. Jonah became an extraordinary disciple, but it was a painful experience of becoming a disciple. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is always a painful experience because we gotta undergo a conversion. When we've been accustomed to doing it all our own way, then we've got to let that go.

The Second Reading — wow, you talk about throwing a spanner in the works. Paul says, "Be attentive to all of this because the end is coming." He said, "Brothers and sisters, time is running out. From now on, those having wives act as if not having them." Wow, there's a number of people doing that already — really it's true. I mean, let's be honest. It is absolutely true in our modern world. And then he says those of you that are weeping act like you're not weeping, and those of you rejoicing act like you're not rejoicing. Hey, have a focus on what is it all about. That's what we've been talking about for months now. Why do I come to church? Why do I this? What on earth am I here for? Does He have a purpose for me?

Then, we have the great Gospel passage. The Gospel is from St. Mark. Last week, we had a very similar version from St. John's Gospel: The Call — the invitation of the disciples to follow Him. Last week we heard, remember John was baptizing and he said, "Hey, look there. That's Him. That's the one that I came to proclaim. Behold, the Lamb of God." Immediately, two of the disciples when off and followed Him. We know that one of them was Andrew. What did Andrew do? Good man Andrew. He did exactly what we are called to do in the Gospel. He went and got his brother Peter and he said, "We have found the Messiah. Come and see." And, he brings Peter to Jesus. That's our mission — every one of us. No one of us excepted from that, or provided an exception from that. The One who created

us —that's as an integral part of our baptism. That we are immersed into identifying Jesus Christ to our brothers and sisters. So Andrew did that.

Then, we read this week, different — Jesus is walking along the sea of Galilee and he sees these guys in their boats, and He said, "Hey, you all — come after me." We can get bogged down in the little peripheral details. They're really unimportant. People can say — well, it was either the way John said Andrew found Peter and brought him to Jesus, or Jesus saw them in the boat. No, it's not either/or. It probably was all of that. It's relayed by the author of the Gospel as they experienced it. One is not opposing the other. But, we love to think that way. Either that one is right and this one is wrong, or this one is wrong that one is right. Not true. Both of those realities are pretty true. That He called them — that is the central piece, and that He never ceases calling people is the real integral truth. Every body, He has a purpose for. We have been reflecting on these questions, "What is my purpose? Does He really have a purpose for me?"

Such a valuable and important question. Why would you not? Why would He create me without a purpose? Why do I do the things that I do? Why am I here on earth? For 40 days during Lent, we will work on the particular project in our small groups in homes, really trying to understand why. Why does He have a purpose? Why am I here at this community at this particular juncture in my life? Does that have anything to do with His plan? You betcha. Start looking at it. Why would He do that? Why would He bring that about in my life at this particular point in time? God doesn't do things aimlessly and without purpose. That is why it is said purposefulness is extremely important. We're looking for — does He really have a purpose for me? Do I really believe that he has? In the modern world it's hard for us to really substantiate that because we are so self absorbed and so self-motivated. We say, well I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this. What about the other side of that reality? Do I stop and say, hey do You have a plan for me? How do I know that plan?

Think of the number of people in the modern world that are unhappy in their work situation or work environment. How many of them indeed have never even thought of the fact that maybe He has a different purpose for me in my life. Maybe He has a real, different purpose, and that is why perhaps I'm not finding the fullness or the experience of joy.

Last week, I read to you the letter from a friend in our church who challenged us to look at our perspectives. He recommended, one thing he said, maybe the church needs to adapt in the modern world to our society. I think — absolutely no. Hey the Church has survived 2000 years. We're the ones that need to adapt to the Church, to Jesus Christ, to the Creator, to the One who gives purpose and meaning to it all. We don't adapt the church or conform the church to our world. We conform ourselves to Christ. St. Paul says, "Conform yourselves to Christ, and in that you will find your purpose." We don't change the Church so as to adapt it to our particular needs. We change our needs, and change our expressions of life so that we find His purpose in our journey.

How beautiful is the imagery in the call in the invitation in the Gospel. He comes along and he says hey, follow me my friends. That is an invitation extended to every single one of us, every man, woman, and child that has come into the world. Follow me. I have a purpose for you in the world. He is not a God who creates without purpose. Everything fits. Everything comes together. If we have that fundamental belief, then I am an integral part of that reality.

The disciples — they knew that because they had seen Him. It's a pity we miss a lot of the drama in the Gospel story because what we don't see is the relationship that they had with him. You know, they weren't getting out of the boat to follow a stranger. They had seen Him very carefully. They had observed Him. They knew there was something about Him, and they had a relationship, and they were ready to hitch their wagon to Him, leave their father. And look at how beautiful the expression is — they left, they abandoned their nets and followed Him. How powerful an expression is that. Perhaps that is the invitation to each one of us. We've got to abandon our nets to follow Him, to become fishers of men

and women. To abandon the nets — how important indeed. What are we fishing for on our own? What is our experience of that fishing? What are we doing? How are we bringing people and connecting people to Christ? He says, “Leave behind your nets and follow me.” What an interesting perspective because a lot of us and a lot of us in the Christian experience, we talk about being born again and being rebirthed in Christ. The only way to come to rebirth is through death. We don't talk a great deal about death. We want to find Christ, and we still want to hold on to everything, and hold on to the nets and everything we've caught ourselves. Jesus said, leave it behind my friends, come and follow me. I have a life for you. The Church in the modern world is a great expression of that.

Let me share with you a quotation I heard. It was back in the 80's. I was at a Youth Conference in Kansas City at St. Joe. And I heard this expression and thought how intensely true and powerful. You know how our Holy Father likes to describe the Church as a field hospital where people come to try and get well, and try and grow, and experience healing and comfort, and letting go of stuff, and leaving their nets behind, and coming through change and conversion. Here is the expression: It was from a guy, Kennedy. He was a Methodist minister. It helps us to see that not just in the Catholic Church, but in all Christian churches, we experience perhaps some of this difficulty. He said, “The church, often described as a hospital contains too many patients who fail to get well. The church, often described as a school contains too many pupils who fail to learn. Is this the church's witness to the world? Sick and ignorant disciples who know not the Christ whom they claim as Lord?”

Wow. It's a daunting reflection. Church, described as a hospital contains too many patients who fail to get well. Is the true? Why is it true if it is true? Church often described as a school contains too many pupils who fail to learn. Is it so? Why is it so? What is the missing ingredient? Is this our witness in the world? I'd like for you to reflect on that during the course of the week. Is that a truth? And, why is it a truth?

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