

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of OT: Yr. B – 2021**  
**[Jon 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor 7:29-31; Mk 1:14-20]**

The intersection of our will and God's will always results in a crucifixion or dying to self. God's will is the vertical beam of the cross and our will is the horizontal beam. Someone hangs at the intersection of these two; first it was Christ, and now it is us. This is the story of the reluctant prophet Jonah who symbolizes the spiritual journey and wrestling with God's will that each of us experiences.

In our first reading, the Word of the Lord came to Jonah commanding him to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh. This was no easy task, for Nineveh was the gigantic capital of an enemy empire called the Assyrians. The heroes in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Joseph, or Moses were all called by God to a special task against insurmountable odds also. Each of these heroes had their own plans for their own lives, but sacrificed them for a higher calling.

Writing to the Ephesians, St. Paul said, *"there is a power already at work in you that can do infinitely more than you can ask or imagine."* This means the Holy Spirit, the life breath of God, is already working in us, preparing us for a course that God has chosen. Here's the problem, we, like Jonah, don't want God setting the course for our life. We cry out in rebellion, *"It's my life, it should be about me!"*

God asked Jonah to go East by land to Nineveh, but Jonah stubbornly headed west by sea towards Tarshish, the farthest corner of the known world. What happened? God sent a storm that tossed the ship and the pagan sailors cried out to their individual gods for help. They even dumped the ship's cargo to lighten the load until Jonah finally confessed that God was looking for him. He repented of his decision to avoid God's will and told the sailors to throw him overboard to calm the seas.

Reading this spiritually, we see that when we are on the wrong course, that is doing our will and not God's will, we are restless and meet obstacles. St. Augustine, the famous sinner turned saint, wrote, *"I was in torment, reproaching myself more bitterly than ever as I twisted and turned in my chain. I hoped that my chain might be broken once and for all ..."* Jonah felt that chain also.

After being tossed into the sea Jonah was swallowed by a whale and delivered to the shores of Nineveh to begin his mission. While in the belly of a whale for three days Jonah probably felt chained and constrained until he surrendered his will and the course of his life to God. This is because the first stage of the spiritual life is called "purgation." It involves painfully pushing what is not God out of our life. It is like a detoxification of our ego.

The famous theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, likened life one of two plays: an "ego-drama" or a "theo-drama." The ego drama is the play written by me, produced by me, and starring me. The theo-drama is the play written and produced by God. In God's plan we have a scripted role that we have been cast for. Jonah, when he finally stepped up and played his role, saved an entire city by converting their hearts back to God. Playing our specific role in the theo-drama means our decisions affect others. If we don't answer our call, and the next person fails, and the next ... then how would God's will be accomplished in this world?

In Christ we see it is okay to surrender our will to God and accept the role He has scripted us for. Christ came to set us free from the chain that holds us back from the fullness of life but we must first acknowledge as Jonah reluctantly did, *"Yes, it's my life, but it is not primarily about me!"* For there is a God who knows us through and through, and He has plotted a course for us. For Pope Benedict said, *"There is an urgent need for the emergence of a new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the Gospel far and wide."* So, are we ready to set sail?