

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Jan. 20-21,
2018

People look at the way the world is today and all the unrest and inability to work together, and they say that we seem to be living in a new and different time that we have ever seen.

How do you feel about the time that we are living in?

In each of the readings today, there is a sense in those involved of living in a time of urgency – a time when a response needs to be given and change needs to happen.

In the first reading, the prophet Jonah is sent to the large city of Nineveh to call the people to repentance.

It sounds like something pretty normal that God might call a prophet to do. However, the situation with Jonah is quite unique. First of all, he was not willing to go to Nineveh. This is because Assyrians that lived in Nineveh were an especially war-like, aggressive and merciless nation. They had earlier destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. So Jonah is being asked to preach not to fellow Israelites but one of their greatest enemies. The only reason he finally went there was because when he resisted before he wound up being thrown overboard in a storm and ended up in the stomach of a whale from which God rescued him.

And then when Jonah goes there, the entire city, without any miracle, is converted in one day. They hear Jonah's message that in 40 days they will be destroyed for their wickedness and they immediately sense the urgency of the moment and they repent.

What this story reveals is something new and wonderful. Normally we would not show mercy to our enemies, but here we see that

God holds out to all people, even the enemies of the Jews, the chance to reform.

Today's psalm is a prayer for Jonah and all of us – "Teach me your ways, O Lord." We certainly need help to be so kind, loving and compassionate as God and so willing to show sinners the way and guide the humble to justice and all he wants to do for this world.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh prepares us for Jesus and his message in the Gospel. The first words of Jesus in his ministry were to proclaim the good news that a new reign of God was now present in the world. The time of fulfillment has arrived. Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God is good news because the reign of God is not like the reign that the people knew. John the Baptist just before this had been arrested and beheaded – typical of the brutality and injustice of the reign of Herod.

The reign of Herod is one of fear and forced compliance. The reign of God's kingdom is one of repentance and conversion and belief in God.

This new reign calls for change and new life.

The ordinary fishermen that Jesus calls don't fully understand all that the new reign of God means, but like the people of Nineveh they sense the urgency of the moment and the great possibilities and give everything up to follow the Lord.

What a great response they give. It is not like Jesus said, "Hey, have you got a minute?", but more like, "What are you doing with the rest of your life?" And four men that day basically said, "We are not doing anything that we would not trade for the great adventure of life with you!"

The truth is that their response was a first love and over time their commitment would

go up and down and need to mature. Likewise we know for ourselves that our relationship with Christ is not a one-time amazing moment, but like all relationships is a life-long give and take.

But the key point of the Gospel is that a new time and opportunity is now present in this world.

St. Paul in the second reading sums it up quite well. "I tell you brothers and sisters, he says, the time is running out, and the end of the world is near." Though the world is still going on 2,000 years later, he is not wrong. The world as we know it is in fact constantly ending. Some ideas, practices, attitudes and goals that are part of this present world and our life need to pass away as the Holy Spirit prepares us for the age to come.

We need to understand that we are in a new time. When we speak of time, we usually are talking about what time it is - what minute, hour, day or year it is. The Greeks also had a second word for time which was Kairos. It meant another kind of time which might use to refer to what we call occasion or opportunity.

It tells us what it is time for. Like, it is time to get our homework done, or it time for me to make a decision, or it is time for the Vikings to win the Super Bowl, etc.

In the first reading it was time for the people of Nineveh to reform their lives and do penance. In the second reading, St. Paul is telling the people that it time to be detached from the things of this world. We need to live in this world with the clear understanding that there is an age to come and that the time until God comes to bring that new age is short.

In fact, the Kairos time of fulfillment of God's promised is something we already experience in Christ's coming and presence with us.

The Christ who is coming in the future is already among us and is a present reality although not in its fullness. Therefore, everything in this life has a new dimension of an "already, but not yet" tension whether it be marrying, weeping, rejoicing, buying, or whatever we are about in this world. In other words, that which we are attached to in this world, even in all its goodness and greatness is only a glimpse of the age to come.

This is what Jesus is saying in the Gospel. This is the time, he says. Now is the opportunity for grace. Now is the season to open ourselves to God's life.

This is the third mystery of light in the rosary – Jesus' call to conversion. And this call is not just a message for other people to hear. Conversion is ongoing. We all sin. We all tend to get our priorities out of order at times. We all have room to grow more in our faith.

Opportunities, as we all know, do not hang around forever. So it is now, not tomorrow, or when we turn 80 or 90 years old, but now is the time for me to turn my life more to Jesus and to the ways of the reign of God.

And perhaps too, the Lord is inviting you as he did Peter, Andrew, James and John, to help get this message out to others. You don't have to be a priest or religious to do this, although we could always use a few more priests or religious. Certainly, whoever you are, whatever your age, you can pray for the conversion of someone, and perhaps even do more to help someone come to our Lord.

So --the next time you look at your watch, don't just see what time it is, but thank God for the precious gift of time and ask yourself

**whether you are using it as best you can.
May we keep ourselves aware that the time we
are now living in is the reign of God – a time
of grace and a time for conversion.**