

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

As we continue thinking about the opening of Jesus public ministry we hear Mark's account of how Jesus called Simon and his brother Andrew and then the two sons of Zebedee James and John, they were fishermen but for Christ they will not catch fish but men. In the first reading Jonah is sent to catch the citizens of Nineveh and lead them into a holier way of life. The second reading gives Paul's teaching about being detached from this world 'because this world as we know it is passing away.'

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jonah. This book should be treated like the parables in the NT because this book is not history but narrative, a tale which carries a message. The hero of the story is Jonah a disobedient prophet who struggles to evade his divine mission and then complains to God when after some very odd happenings his mission is successful. 'Nineveh, the great city' was destroyed in 612 but the book was not written until after the return from Exile, sometime in the fourth century. Further against the book's historicity there is no trace in history of the conversion of the king of Nineveh and his people to the God of Israel. So what does this narrative teach? That prophecy must not be interpreted too rigidly, that even the direst threats from God are an expression of the merciful will of God who pardons at the first sign of repentance. Jonah preaches destruction but his threats are conditional and at the first sign of repentance, of conversion, God's will is achieved and Joel's mission is accomplished. Again we learn that even the pagans can receive God's mercy, God is God not only of the Jews but also God of the gentiles. The reading, 3.1-5,10, comes just after Jonah has been vomited onto dry land by the fish. Jonah has once tried to evade the mission God gave him and the reading begins with God addressing Jonah again. He must go to the great city of Nineveh 'and preach to them as I told you.' Jonah carries out God's command and the people believe in God, proclaim 'a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.' God relents and does not punish the Ninevites as he had threatened because of their evil behaviour. Read from 3.1-10.if you have time.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 24.4-9, is a prayer in time of danger, for the Ninevites in danger of God's punishment. The words are self-explanatory and are a prayer for us when, like the citizens of Nineveh, we stray from the true path of life.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 7.29-31, begins with a statement from Paul which may seem strange for us who have lived nearly two thousand years since these words were written. Paul says 'the time has become limited' or 'is growing short.' What does Paul mean? Whatever the interval between now and the end of time, the *parousia*, the interval loses its importance in view of the fact that, in the risen Christ, the world to come is already present. Hence Paul's teaching: live as though you are not married, have nothing to mourn about, those enjoying life in this world should think more of life in the next, don't be attached to your possessions and become too engrossed in this world. Why? 'Because this world as we know it is passing away.'