

Homily. 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.B. 23/24 January 2021.

What most of us know about the story of Jonah is that he ended up spending 3 days and nights in the belly of a whale. Well, actually the bible says it was a 'sea monster' or a 'big fish' but that's beside the point. Even Jesus quoted this story when speaking about his own impending 3 days and nights in the heart of the earth. What most of us don't remember however is why this happened.

The story of Jonah is all about his reluctance to be a prophet of God's word to the pagan people of the great city of Nineveh. God called him to go North East preaching repentance to the people of that city so that they might be converted and saved. Jonah promptly caught a boat heading South West towards what we know today as Spain. On the way a great storm broke out threatening to drown all aboard. When the sailors discovered that Jonah was fleeing from God's call they tossed him overboard thinking that the storm was God's vengeance for Jonah's disobedience. The storm cleared but Jonah found himself swallowed by the whale for 3 days until it spat him out on the shore right back where he'd started.

Defeated by God's determination Jonah then went with little hope to Nineveh, preaching a half-hearted homily of just 9 words, whereupon the entire city repented and was saved from destruction. It's clear to us now that Jonah's story is really all about God's power to do great things for us and through us even despite our weaknesses and lack of enthusiasm. The call of the first 4 disciples in Mark's gospel and the speed of their response is a stark contrast to the ducking and weaving of Jonah. It's very likely that Jesus had some knowledge of these Galilee fishermen

before He took His walk along the Seashore, calling them to follow Him and become fishers of people. With this being said, we must bear in mind the far from flattering way that the disciples acted during the entire course of Jesus ministry; often muddled and misunderstanding Him, seeking power and prestige for themselves, frequently fickle and just as speedy to betray, abandon and flee from their Lord when He needed them the most.

Yet, for whatever reasons they were the ones Jesus chose to be with Him, the troops He picked to be His disciples who would eventually go and become His apostles to the world and Saints of our faith. In the same way that God chose the young and frail David to be King of Israel, reluctant Jonah to be a Prophet of mercy and the ordinary and gentle Mary and Joseph to be Jesus parents, so Jesus called the disciples He did. More personally, it's you and me that our Lord now calls to follow His footsteps and way today and there's no telling why.

Maybe it's so as to console us in our frailty by the long history of God's power and forgiveness; to strengthen us with hope despite our avoidance and excuses, or as St. Paul would say, so that through our weakness others would come to see and realise that any good we do, any success we have, flows from God's power in us and not from our own gifts and talents. This is the gospel, the Good-News for us today. I really hope that we all hear this very welcome message and make it our own.