

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – As mentioned last week – the Church Liturgical Calendar moves into what is called Ordinary Time. Yet, there is nothing ordinary about this time as we continue to follow the life and teachings of Jesus from His Baptism until His arrival in Jerusalem. This year, the Gospel readings for Sunday Masses will be from Matthew's Gospel. Likely, Matthew's community was composed of Jewish Christians who would have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies and expectations of the coming of the Messiah. Matthew carefully crafts his portrait of Jesus so that He resembles Moses, Israel's greatest prophet and teacher. Matthew's insertion of five teaching blocks into Mark's narrative framework may be an attempt to parallel the teachings of Jesus with the five books of Moses, the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Last week we heard the call of Samuel, and John the Baptist pointing his disciples to follow Jesus. This week we hear of, not only, more calls for prophets and disciples, but equally important – the need for us to have a change of heart and to try to live our lives in harmony with what God asks of each of us.

The first reading from the prophet Jonah details Jonah's second call or commission from the Lord. In the chapters preceding today's selection, Jonah ignored God's request to preach to the pagan city of Nineveh in Assyria. When today's selection begins, Jonah is on his way to the city of his enemies. His preaching is successful. The people of Nineveh – king and commoner – repent and believe in God, Who sees their sincerity and does not send divine wrath upon them. This story of Jonah is a post-exile story meant to remind the Jews that God's judgment and mercy extend beyond the narrow bounds of Israel to include even a nation as wicked as Assyria.

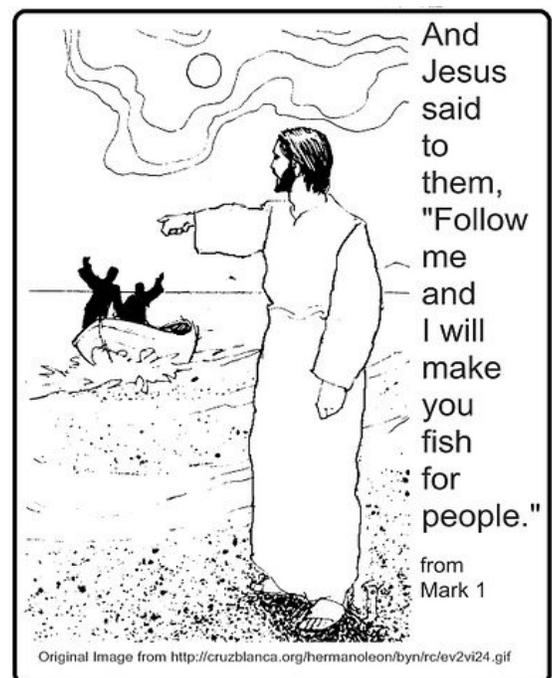
We return to Mark's Gospel after visiting John the Evangelist last weekend. As today's Gospel opens, John's arrest signals the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He came to Galilee to proclaim the Gospel of God. "The reign of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." The Gospel has two components: urgency of the end-times and a response on the part of the listeners. As Mark's Gospel continues, the reader will recognize that the reign of God is made manifest in the person and deeds of Jesus. This Gospel of God that Jesus proclaims requires a response. Those who hear are to repent (*metanoia*) and believe. Like the people of Nineveh in the first reading, one must change his or her way of thinking and behaving. *Metanoia* means literally – a change of mind. But change is not enough. One must also believe in the good news of God. The call of the disciples becomes a narrative example of the appropriate response to the Gospel. Simon and Andrew and then James and John literally drop what they are doing, leaving behind their livelihood and their families in response to Jesus' summons.

For us today – is it still true for us that "the world in its present form is passing away"? While Christians of the first century might have presumed that Jesus would return and God's kingdom would be established in their lifetime, are we supposed to share that presumption?

Even though the Season of Lent is several weeks away, we still are being called to a change of heart. Conversion is a lifelong process for most of us. It is an awakening of our deepest desire to be one with God, and it is the story of our struggle to cast aside all distractions so that we may journey toward wholeness with God. Our lives are cluttered with many distractions that cause our eyes to be clouded and our hearts to be shielded from the vision of God. Sometimes we may even feel that we are making very little positive progress on our Spiritual journey. There is so much in our everyday lives that we leave little room for God to enter in. Conversion may best be seen as a spiral. It is the winding journey toward wholeness that builds upon relationship with God. The nourishing of that relationship requires constant reevaluation and refocusing of our priorities in order to leave behind that which distracts us, and to embrace that which brings us into more intimacy with God. This is not done quickly or easily. But it is a journey that one day ends, placing us firmly in the open arms of the God Who calls each of us.

Let us pray for the Conversion of the World
& for Peace

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greatest philosopher of the ancient world, had been newly rediscovered, and were becoming available to people in the West for the first time in a thousand years. Many felt that the writings of Aristotle were contradictory to Christianity and thus his teachings banned in many universities at the time. Into such chaos and thinking arrives Thomas Aquinas. He brought simple, straightforward sense. Truth cannot contradict truth: if Aristotle appears to contradict Christianity, then either Aristotle is wrong or the contradiction is in fact illusory. And so Thomas studied, and taught, and argued, and eventually the simple, common-sense philosophy that he worked out brought an end to the controversy. Out of Thomas' works came many writings on philosophy and theology, including the *Summa Theologiae*, a standard textbook for many centuries and still an irreplaceable resource today.

Saints for this week –

January 25 – The Conversion of St. Paul – Saul, the young man who looked after the cloaks of the men who were stoning St. Stephen, grew into a dedicated and efficient persecutor of Christians. Today's feast celebrates the day that Jesus appeared to him in a vision as he was on the way to Damascus, reproached him for his persecutions asking: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" With that incident, Saul of Tarsus converts and becomes St Paul. Much of the New Testament writings are attributed to him with his many letters to the various churches he oversaw.

January 26 – St. Timothy & St. Titus – Timothy and Titus were converted to Christianity by St Paul, and became his companions and helpers. Paul entrusted Timothy with the care of Christians in Ephesus, and sent Titus to Crete to look after the Christians there. He wrote them the so-called "pastoral" epistles/letters, giving advice for pastors and all people alike.

January 27 – St. Angela Merici – born in Lombardy about 1470, she became a Franciscan tertiary and set up a school to instruct girls in Christianity and good works. In 1535 she founded the Ursulines, an order of Nuns devoted to giving a Christian education to girls from poor families.

January 28 – St. Thomas Aquinas – born of a noble family in southern Italy, and educated by the Benedictines. He studied in Paris and in Cologne under the great philosopher St Albert the Great. It was a time of great philosophical ferment. The writings of Aristotle, the