

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
January 25, 2009

Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

Saving, Not Surviving

Does anyone ever watch the *Survivorman* show? It's about this guy who goes out into different remote places and tries to survive for a week. He's been in the jungle, in the Arctic, and in the desert. He needs to find shelter and water and food. He needs to start a fire. Unlike some similar shows, he doesn't bring a camera crew with him. Instead he brings several small, portable cameras to record his adventures. I was watching the show the other week and he had a little different twist. Instead of being alone, he had a friend with him and they went into the woods of northern Ontario in the fall. The premise was that they were on a hunting trip and get lost in the woods and have to survive for a week until someone would come looking for them. It was interesting, because the environment they were lost in was similar to the type of wilderness that many of us would encounter in northern Michigan; it wasn't some exotic location that I couldn't relate to.

Well, *Survivorman's* friend took off his hat, unzipped a small interior pocket, and removed a fish hook that he always carried with him. He confidently looked into one of the cameras and explained how he would catch fish for them to eat for the week. Seven days later, he had not caught a single fish. He may have been a great recreational fisherman, but when his life depended on it, he wasn't as prepared as he thought. Catching fish takes a lot more preparation than just having a hook in your hat.

Our gospel story this morning is another version of the call of the first apostles. Last week we heard from the Gospel of John how Jesus called Simon and renamed him Cephas, which means Peter. Today in Mark's gospel we hear how Simon and his brother Andrew were fishing and Jesus calls them to follow Him and that He will make them fishers of men. James and John were there, too, mending their nets. They were good fishermen. They knew the ways of the sea. They spent their days taking care of their boats and mending their nets so that they could catch fish each day because their lives *did* depend on it. It wasn't just a hobby or sport.

But now Jesus calls them to a new vocation; to catch souls and no longer catch fish. And they needed to follow Jesus as He preached His message of conversion and repentance; it would be a time of preparation for them so that they would be good fishers of men. They needed to learn from the Master. It wasn't just about survival, it was about saving souls. Jesus wasn't *Survivorman*; He is *Saviorman*.

In the Bible we have many examples of conversions and how people respond to God's call. Last week we heard about Samuel and Simon Peter. Today we hear how Jonah finally responded to God's call. When God first called Jonah, he resisted and got in a boat and headed in the opposite direction. But God showed him who was in charge, and after Jonah was thrown overboard, we hear how he spent three days in the belly of a whale and ended up at Nineveh against his own wishes. He finally gave in and went throughout Nineveh, much like Jesus in the gospel, spreading a message of conversion and repentance. Today, although we celebrate the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 25th is also the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. You probably all remember the story

of how Saul was headed to Damascus to persecute the Christians and he was knocked to the ground and blinded by a great light. And Jesus said to him: ***“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me.”*** And after his conversion Saul’s name was changed to Paul. He had a new mission, but first he spent time with the disciples in Damascus to prepare.

I’m sure many of you have had conversion experiences. It’s always fascinating for me to go on a retreat or pilgrimage and meet new people and hear about their faith journeys. I’m sure there are a lot of amazing stories that you all have. Some conversions are subtle; so subtle sometimes that it’s hard to pinpoint an exact time or event. Some are very dramatic like St. Paul’s. Some occur very reluctantly like Jonah’s; against our best efforts to resist them. And some of you may experience a significant event yet in the future. No matter how and when we are called, however, we are all meant to preach the gospel, the good news, and call sinners to conversion.

I think we can take away two messages from this morning’s readings:

1. We cannot just worry about our own soul, we need to reach out to others, but we need to do it in love and not in judgment. People will not want to hear us when we tell them that contraception, abortion, homosexuality, and fornication are wrong. Some will accuse of hate crimes for stating the truth that these actions are against God’s will. But we spread the truth not out of hate, but out of love. If we didn’t care about the souls of others, we could easily keep our mouths shut and worry only about ourselves. We speak the truth and leave the rest to God. He will send His Spirit to soften hearts and minds and souls as He did in Nineveh. As Mother Teresa reminds us: ***“God hasn’t called me to be successful. He’s called me to be faithful.”***
2. We must be prepared. Just like we cannot carry a hook in our hat and expect to catch fish without planning and preparation, we cannot carry our Bible under our arm and expect to win over souls. We need to read it. The Bible and the Catechism are not meant to sit on the shelf and wait for an emergency. We need to study our faith at all times and be prepared and knowledgeable when opportunities arise. And those opportunities are times when we are called not just to survive, but to be God’s instruments to save.

Deacon Joe Hulway