

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jesus said, "***The time has come ... and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News***"

What is, or where is, the kingdom of God? Jesus never answers this question and never defines the meaning of the kingdom of God. He just keeps on telling us, that the time has come, and the kingdom of God is now near.

In reality, Jesus wants us to work out the answer ourselves. This we can do by letting ourselves be taught by him, by listening to his parables, and by observing his actions. To help us, he has given each one of us a mentor, the Holy Spirit that lives within us. Therefore, if we work closely with the Holy Spirit, we will discover, in our own personal way, and in our own time, that Jesus himself, is the kingdom of God.

And when he is saying that the kingdom is near, he is really saying, that he, himself, is near. When we discover this, we have the answer to our question.

The first action for us to observe, is his calling of his first four disciples. They were four fishermen, hard at work in their boats. They probably didn't see him coming, then suddenly he summoned them, "***Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men.***" Then without any hesitation, they obeyed his summons, leaving behind their family, their jobs, and their future.

They were never volunteers. They didn't ask to become disciples of Jesus. When they were called, they obeyed. The only explanation for their prompt response, must have been the attractiveness of the person of Jesus.

The disciples were not given any training programme. No clues yet, of what they will be doing or any hints of what they will be. They were simply told, that they would be fishers of men, and that he, Jesus, would be their only trainer. These four fishermen formed the nucleus of the twelve disciples, and later the nucleus of the universal Church. I wonder, what would have happened if they had said, No!

Now Jonah was very different. When he was called, he did not respond, and refused to go on his first mission. He made the mistake of believing that he could travel out of God's reach. He was so wrong. He was shipwrecked, and only survived because God sent a big fish to save him. God sent Jonah on a three day renewal course, and an opportunity to repent. So Jonah prays, he reflects, he remembers, and then he promises to fulfil the Word of God.

And now, obedient to his calling, Jonah is sent to the pagan city of Nineveh, and proclaims the unambiguous message, "***Only forty days more and Nineveh is going to be destroyed***". Everyone pays attention. And they renounce their evil behaviour. God turns from his anger, and the people are overjoyed.

This Old Testament story is one of repentance, Jonah repents, Nineveh repents, and even God repents. Repentance is Good News, because nothing is settled, nothing is sealed. Punishment that is planned, can always be cancelled. Things can change. If God can begin again, so can we begin again, and again, and again.

We have two examples of responses, to a calling from God. The four fishermen were very prompt because they were from the faithful remnant, the anawim, who kept faith, and believed that the Messiah would come. However, Jonah, was in no way as strong in faith as them. He was weak in his faith, or perhaps even lapsed. Nevertheless, he recognised the calling of God, but he just didn't want to obey it.

I believe that we are called at our conception, for a task that no one else is called to do. I believe that God talks to us, whilst we are in the womb. And then as young children, we still remain in tune with the voice of God. But as we grow older, things of the world gradually block out God's voice. We still hear his voice, but it appears faint, and worldly things stop us from listening.

Sometimes his voice is very clear, sometimes it is booming, but we are like Jonah, and quickly make plans to get away, rather than say Yes! Perhaps, we do not have the faith, and trust, of the fishermen. Perhaps, we are reluctant to obey, because we are convinced that we are not up to it, and therefore we believe that we will fail.

But, we forget that the task is not our task but God's task for us. And we forget that the task cannot be completed on our own, our task is a joint one. Jesus leads, the Holy Spirit guides, the Father prepares, and we walk, the path.

Over the years, we may have missed our call, large or small, or missed several calls, or missed the same call many times. But just like Jonah, we can repent, have a renewal, and the next time hear him clearly, and this time, we will listen to the voice of God.

***"The time has come ... and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News"***. Jesus is close at hand, have faith in him, trust in him, obey him. Repentance is Good News.