

My brothers and sisters, in each of today's readings we find a theme, one for each reading. The first one, is the theme of repentance, hearing a message and avoiding calamity. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we hear the message to prepare, for the form of this world is changing. And in our Gospel reading from Mark there's the theme of fulfillment.

The first reading today there's the story of Jonah, preaching repentance to the city of Nineveh. Now almost everyone has heard the story of Jonah in the belly of the whale. But the point of this story is altogether lost by most people who do not really know how he got into that predicament to begin with. Now if you have not read the book of Jonah, you really should because it's about a real comedian. God chooses Jonah to be his prophet and to preach repentance to the Ninevites. Asking Jonah to do this would be like asking a Thunder fan to pray that Houston wins the NBA title. Just isn't going to happen.

Jonah was not only a reluctant prophet, though there were many reluctant prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos. Not only is he reluctant, but he rebels. You have to laugh at a guy who tells God he will *absolutely* go east and preach, then books passage on the fastest ship heading *west*! That's what he did. Of course, he ends up being thrown overboard by prayerful, non-Jewish sailors, who recognize that God wants Jonah off that boat. And he ends up in the belly of a big fish. that's the story we all know.

After three days, Jonah is spit up on the shore and finally heads toward Nineveh. There the inhabitants of the capitol city, and this is the capitol city of the most violent kingdom of that age, end up believing in his message. And immediately they fast, including the cattle, and begin to pray. When God has compassion on them and forgives them, Jonah is furious. For that was exactly what he was afraid was going to happen.

And at the end of the book, we find Jonah sitting under a tree, that is, by the way, shriveling away, taking away his shade, his last place to hide from God, Who so maddeningly forgave the people that he, Jonah, hates.

The book of Jonah is like the parables of Jesus. And like the parables, it has a very important lesson to teach. Jonah represents the people who are petty, selfish, and who do not want to share anything, not even God, with other people. Jonah is symbolic of those who hate other people, hold grudges, and refuse to be

reconciled with their enemies. Even though they expect their God to forgive their sins. Jonah represents those people who do not understand God but claim Him as theirs.

Now as I said in the beginning, the theme of our second reading was preparation. We are told in this small section that the world is passing away and that our actions must change. But the phrase that Paul uses is that the *form* of the world is changing. Well what does he mean by the form? Was he talking about the end of time? Was he referring to maybe fire and brimstone ending of the world? I don't think so. His message is one of immediacy. Get ready, for we don't know how or the hour of our Lord's return. But we ought to start behaving in such a way so that when He does come, we are among the sheep and not the goats. We must put all our energy into seeking God and the ways of God. Isn't that the message just as true today as it was in AD 60 when Paul wrote this letter?

And with our Gospel reading from Mark, we find not only our third theme, that of fulfilment, but in our reading from Mark, we find that it includes the other two themes as well. The third theme that I'd like to share is one of fulfilment.

Now, the Baptist's ministry is over, and soon his life will be also. And in his preaching for repentance (our first theme), he calls his listeners to prepare (our second theme) for the coming of the Messiah. The Lamb of God is to come in fulfilment of the promise God made to His early believers, that a Savior would come. As Jesus begins to shine, John begins to fade.

Before He sacrificed Himself on the cross for our salvation, Jesus set about to ensure the continuance of His mission on this earth after His death and resurrection. At the beginning of His public ministry, He selects His apostles. Those chosen disciples who would be the nucleus around which He would build His church. They would become fishers of men. Fishers of souls. With a net that is so big it was enormously larger than the fish that got Jonah. It was so large that it could encompass all of mankind.

Now God is big, but we tend to be petty. God is forgiving, but we tend to hold back forgiveness from those who hurt us. God is generous, but we tend to be selfish. The sign of how God is different from Jonah and those who are like him, is the cross. In the second Eucharistic prayer that Fr Danny sometimes uses, it says, "Jesus opened His arms on the cross..." He did so in order to embrace men and

women of every time and place. He extends His arms, that is He reaches out, far and wide, as He could so no one would be excluded from His love.

Now we call our church Catholic because it is universal. It extends back through all the ages to the time of Christ, and will remain until He returns in glory. It is catholic also in the sense that all people are included. Although the Church was founded in Jerusalem, it is not Jewish. Though the Church found its center in Rome, it is not Italian. Though the Church was spread mainly by European missionaries, the Church is not European. The Church is catholic, universal.

No authentic Catholics close their hearts to others like Jonah. Rather, like Christ, Catholics open their arms, they extend their arms to embrace everyone: saints and sinners alike. And as we embrace sinners, we should not forget the innocents who die at our hands.

Tomorrow is the 45th anniversary of Roe v Wade. We're about to begin a time where we'll hear messages about how life is important and sacred. And we know it is! What do we, as members of the universal Church, what are we doing about it? To stop this horrific massacre. The number of aborted children in our country is now slightly over 58 million, since 1973. It is **double** the total number of people who have perished in genocides in the last hundred years. What are we as Catholic, all embracing, members of a Church that espouses the concept of love, what are we doing about this? Are we politically active? Do we support right to life groups? Do we even say a rosary for the lost lives?

And what about those unfortunate women, who in a moment of crisis, find themselves in a position where, where do they turn? Where do they go? they're scared. They're terrified. Many of these wonderful women fall into a situation of desperation. And they turn to where they think is a solution. And many of them today bear the guilt, shame, and pain, of their actions. Borne out, not from a malicious intent, but from a sense of desperation. What do we do for them? Do we reach out to them, those that we know? Do we embrace them as Jesus did from the cross, arms out, welcoming all, saints and sinners alike?

For my brothers and sisters, that act on the cross was not only His act! That was an event for our salvation, but He expects us to not only listen to the words He gave us in the Gospels, but to live out His life! Have we extended our arms? Do we turn to those in need and say, "Come, I'll hold you. I'll put my arms around

you and let you cry on my shoulder.” Because, brothers and sisters, fundamentally, that’s what we’re expected to do! If we truly believe in Christ, we are to reach out and to hold one another, to cry with one another, to let our heart be their heart. To feel their pain. I don’t do that good of a job in that. I try. And I’m given a lot more opportunities to do it than many of you. But it doesn’t make it any easier.

Remember, we see our children, and we’re proud of our children. and I smile when I hear these wonderful voices. But there are a lot of voices that are not heard today. And there are a lot of women out there, mothers to be, who carry that burden. Let us reach out as Jesus extends His hands, let us reach out to them, hold them, and tell them the God loves them.