

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Seeing today's Gospel is set by the water's edge, this story seems appropriate.

Today's readings are about gaining things. Jonah, Paul, and Mark know real gain usually comes less dramatically and quickly, and involves letting go of something as much as it involves taking it on. In the Christian life this is called conversion, and it's at the center of our life of faith.

Christian conversion is not a once-in-a-lifetime moment. It can happen every day in a rich variety of ways. It involves a change in attitude as much as a change in lifestyle.

All three readings show a different facet of conversion. Jonah calls the Ninevites to social conversion. St Paul, who reveals a very strong expectation that the end of time is near, calls the people of Corinth to a conversion of mind. And through relating the call of Simon, Andrew, James, and John, St Mark tells us about personal conversion.

These days we regularly hear God's call in personal terms. It's sometimes called "me and God" theology. Modern hymns reflect it best. We regularly sing about how Jesus died "for me," or that "here I am Lord" or that "I will follow you." Individually these lines are all true, the problem is that they tend to play down the more ancient and biblical social dimensions of our call to conversion. In the Bible even though God and Jesus call people to conversion through personal relationships, there is no hint that this is where it stops. Every call leads to the wider community, to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and out to the entire world in the New Testament.

Today's readings provide a litmus test for our conversion. If our faith has become a self-help club, where we talk about "my" God, "my" prayers, "my" Church, "my" Mass, we are in need of conversion. We don't need to leave God's personal love for us behind; we just need to see it as a necessary preparation for belonging to the people of God as we engage with the world at every level. We are challenged to reject the idea that it's me-and-God-against-the-world, and welcome in the idea that it's US-and-God-IN-the-world.

May this Eucharist give us the strength, resources, and intelligence we need to be converted personally and socially again this Sunday.

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