

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday OT – (Year B) – January 21, 2018

JON 3:1-5, 10; PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; 1 COR 7:29-31; MK 1:14-20

It's easy to underestimate just how clever the Devil is. He has a way of **distorting** things with such skill that we don't often see what he's doing **until *after*** we've fallen into his trap.

Here's an **example** of how he works:

Ever since **Bishop Olmsted** reformed the **marriage preparation program** for our **diocese** about ten years ago—incidentally, making our marriage prep process in the Diocese of Phoenix a model for dioceses throughout the country—part of the bishop's reform was to establish five-person teams comprised of two married couples and one priest to present a full-day workshop to couples on **St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body***.

When my team first started, were naturally a little “green” at the process and we weren't well prepared for the resistance we would face. Some of us on the team, including myself, became **discouraged**, because most of the couples had been so malformed about marriage by our sick sex-obsessed secular culture, that they were resistant to the **truth, goodness and beauty of God's teaching on marriage as contained in their own Catholic Church**. Some of the attendees were openly **hostile** or **indifferent** to the teaching, and many of them **communicated** as much through their **crossed arms, frowns and obvious inattention**.

And while at least one other member of our team felt as I did about this situation, I will only speak for myself when I say that I began to feel **resentful** toward the couples, even though some of them—in fact **a lot** of them—were actually quite **open** to the teaching. I got so distracted by the negative reaction of participants—***no doubt, prodded by the Devil***—that it was affecting our team's spiritual fruitfulness.

We were thinking, “**These people don't care. They're here because they have to be. They don't appreciate what we're doing. Why are we wasting our time on them?**”

Now, ***whose words*** do those sound like—**Jesus's** words...or the ***Devil's*** words?

Where I really began to see the **rotten fruit of my bad attitude** was in the Confessions offered after I taught my two segments of the program. Very few of the participants would even **come** to Confession which made me even **more** resentful.

But God was nevertheless **merciful to me**—his **priest**; and **concerned about these couples**—his *lost sheep*. I finally realized what was happening during prayer one day, and God made it very clear to me that I needed to *pray for the conversion of these couples before teaching them*. So, we started to pray for them, **deliberately**, as a team...and something rather miraculous began to happen.

**Non-stop Confessions from the time confessions were offered until the end of the day's events!**

Even **non-Catholics** would come to talk to me—not to confess, of course—but to discuss what they had learned and to ask questions! Sure, there were **still** those who remained **resistant** to the teaching, but **many** more seemed to **embrace** it. God had shifted my focus back to what was important—**the good of these men's and women's souls**—reversing the Devil's efforts to divert my focus to the **bad** rather than the **good**.

Don't be surprised that **priests are just as susceptible to the Devil's deceptions as anyone else**—perhaps more so, because the Devil *so* wants to derail the **preaching** of the **truth, goodness and beauty** of the **Faith**, that he works overtime to harass **priests**.

And he's been doing this kind of thing since the beginning. Just consider the **Prophet Jonah**. God called Jonah to enter **enemy territory**—to warn the **Assyrian** people in their capital of **Nineveh** to **convert** or to be *destroyed*. Jonah wanted nothing to do with this mission because the Assyrians had **invaded** Jerusalem, **destroyed** the Temple, and **exiled** many of the people. Jonah hated them.

As we know from the **Book of Jonah**, he tried to run away from his mission, but through a series of extraordinary events, was **brought back** right to his **starting point** and told *again* to carry out his mission. He did so this time—though **reluctantly** and **resentfully**—and God nevertheless brought about the conversion of the people of Nineveh, starting with the king and spreading to every person in the kingdom. The people of Nineveh **realized** their sin and *repented*, despite the **disobedience, resistance and resentment** of the *prophet*.

Our **1<sup>st</sup> Reading** tells us:

*When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.* (Jon 3:10)

And this becomes a lesson for us...today...as the events of this weekend become a great context in which to consider the lesson. **Monday, January 22**, marks the 45th anniversary of the single most **misguided** and **deadly** decision of the **Supreme Court of the United States**—*legalizing the execution of innocent babies in the womb by the free choice of their mothers and the cooperation of doctors.*

Notice I did not use the word **abortion**—because the word itself has become **meaningless** to many people. So, let's call it what it **actually** is:

**The voluntary and deliberate killing of innocent children with the blessing of the government, and the deadly skills of medical personnel, perpetrated through the Devil's deception of mothers.**

In many ways, the **American** culture is like the **Assyrian** culture that *Jonah hated*. Some historians believe that **crucifixion was invented by the Assyrians** and was later refined in brutality by other cultures. So, America shares a violent connection with **Assyria's "Culture of Death"** as about 3,000 innocent children in the womb are **snuffed out** each day in our own country.

Now, if you don't think you have a little "Jonah" in **you**, then pay attention to how you **feel** in your **mind** and **heart** when you are called to **pray** for *doctors* who kill innocent babies in the womb. Remember, you're not called to **scream** at them...not called to **condemn** them...but to *pray* for them. **That** little resistance in your heart and mind makes **you**...and *me*...very much like **Jonah!**

The Devil has succeeded in deceiving many **Catholics** and **Protestants** to the point of despair of the conversion of our society from a *Culture of Death* to a *Culture of Life*. You can hear this in **Catholics** who say things like:

**"The abortion issue has been decided. It's the law of the land. We've lost that battle. We need to move on to other more important issues."**

Earlier today **many hundreds** of pro-lifers gathered in downtown **Phoenix** for a *Rally and March for Life*. As we marched, **hundreds of thousands** of **faithful, joyful** Catholics, Protestants and other people of goodwill did the same in **Washington DC**, and in many other parts of the country.

This is the biggest difference, by the way, between the *so-called Women's March*—with its **foul language** and **bitter spirit**—and the **March for Life**—with its hundreds

of thousands of **courageous, joy-filled, smiling** young people, families, people of faith, people of no-faith, and so many others who **celebrate life** rather than **venerate death**.

If you want to see *where God is* when comparing these two marches, look for the **joy!**

But *despite* the **joy**, is it **realistic** to hope for a large-scale conversion of America as we saw in the large-scale conversion of Nineveh? After all, we need only look at recent history to see how fickle Americans are, *even when prodded to conversion by tragedy*.

You may recall in the immediate aftermath of the **September 11, 2001 terror attacks** in **New York, Washington DC, Pennsylvania** and the **Pentagon**, that Catholic Churches and other places of worship across the nation were *bursting at the seams with worshippers*. It looked hopeful for a while, as people demonstrated an apparent **desire to get right with God**. That is, until, fallen human nature took center stage again in most people's lives and they fell right back into their former ways.

Not only did we *not* see a long-term conversion back to God following **9/11**, but the **exact opposite** has occurred such that we now see a **steep decline** in religious **practice** and a **steep increase** in religious **persecution** here in America, perpetrated, in large part, by our **government institutions**, with the blessing of the **media** and the cooperation of many of our **fellow citizens**.

**How ironic, isn't it, that the God to whom people fled when they felt most vulnerable, is the same God that many now consider their enemy?**

A much smaller-scale, but equally telling incident occurred last Saturday in **Hawaii**. After the **cell phone emergency warning system** broadcast an imminent missile attack on Hawaii, many people—even after they realized that the message was a false alarm—filled Catholic Churches and Confessionals across the islands. One Catholic who witnessed the on-the-spot “**repentance**” dubbed the phenomenon **#misseleconversions**.

It's easy to become **skeptical** and **pessimistic** when we see such pattern repeat in our country. It's easy because we tend to focus on **fallen human nature** instead of on **God's power, love and mercy**.

If we stop **complaining about** our nation and start **praying for** our nation then, and only then, will we witness a reversal of **America's self-destruction** which readily

embraces **sin** and calls it *good*, while forcing the **Faith** to the sidelines through **social pressure** and **legislative overreach**.

**St. Paul's** words from our **2<sup>nd</sup> Reading** are as true today as they were when he wrote them to the **Corinthians**:

*...the world in its present form is passing away.* (1 Cor 7:31)

*A society built on lies will eventually die.* A culture that celebrates the **execution** of **innocent life**; the **destruction** of the **family** through the **deliberate obliteration** of **male** and **female** distinctions; and the **redefinition of marriage** to the point of **meaninglessness**—such a culture is **literally** committing suicide.

If we continue to treat our **televisions** like *Tabernacles*—spending **hours in agitation** as we watch the news—instead of **spending hours in Adoration** before the **True Tabernacle**, then we will not even **recognize** the Good Shepherd's voice when he calls you...and me...to follow him, *as he called the first disciples in the Gospel today*, to proclaim the Good News of **love** and **life** to a culture of **hate** and **death**.

Today's **Psalms** proclaims:

*Good and upright is the LORD, therefore he shows sinners the way, he guides the humble in righteousness, and teaches the humble his way.* (Ps 25:8-9)

**Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life** (cf. Jn 14:6).

To march for **Life**, then, is to march for *Jesus*.

And to march for **Jesus** is to share his desire for the salvation of those who consider God their enemy, but who just need to be invited to open their hearts to the same love and mercy that we have been so blessed to receive.