

## Lesson 13

### Third Sunday after the Epiphany

#### The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:14–20

Mark, in his hurried, “newspaper” style, did not devote much time to background. In the first 13 verses of his Gospel, he quickly told of the ministry of John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, and Jesus’ testing by the devil in the desert. Then he moved immediately into an account of the ministry of Jesus, an account that emphasizes what Jesus did more than what He said. A favorite word of Mark was *euthus*, translated “immediately” or “at once” or “without delay.” In one sentence, Mark told of the end of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and even gave a summary of Jesus’ proclamation.

174. What three elements do you find in this summary of Jesus’ proclamation?

The Greek word *kairos* speaks of “an appropriate time” or “an opportune time.” The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed is not a place. It is His rule in the lives of men and women. When that rule confronts us at the appropriate time in God’s plan, it becomes the opportune time for us. *Metanoiete*, “repent,” called for a change of heart and mind that influences one’s whole direction in life. *Pisteuete*, “believe,” involves more than intellectual acceptance of a fact; it calls for a relationship of confidence and trust. Both are imperatives in the present tense, which in Greek calls for continuing action—“keep on repenting and keep on believing”—in the *kairos* that God gives us.

175. What did Jesus’ “The time is fulfilled” say to people to whom He was preaching? What does it say to you for your life?

176. What did Jesus’ “The kingdom of God is at hand” say to people to whom He was preaching? What does it say to you for your life?

177. What did Jesus’ “Keep on repenting and believing in the Gospel” say to people to whom He was preaching? What does it say to you for your life?

178. How are repentance and faith *enabled* by the Good News assurance that we are accepted by God?

Most scholars believe that Mark traveled with Peter as his scribe and assistant. The Gospel of Mark is seen as Peter's eyewitness account, and so it appropriately begins with the call of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to be fishers of men.

179. How is it that these men were immediately ready to leave everything at once to follow Jesus?

180. What three elements or emphases come together to make up the call that Jesus extended? What do each of them say to us for our lives as His disciples?

181. What does it say about their mission that Jesus called ordinary, uneducated men to be His disciples and apostles? What does this say to you about the work you may be asked to do in the Church?

## **The Old Testament Lesson: Jonah 3:1–5, 10**

Jonah was a prophet of the Lord at the time of Jeroboam II of Israel (see 2 Kings 14:25), a time when Damascus, the capital of Syria, had fallen to the Assyrians. Jeroboam was able to regain much of the northern territory that had been lost to the Syrians. But looming on the northern horizon was the awesome might of Assyria, which was taking on the proportions of a true world power.

The Book of Jonah tells the story of the prophet who tried to run away from the Lord and from his assigned duties as the Lord's prophet. He had been ordered to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with a call to repentance. Jonah wanted Assyria to be judged and destroyed by the Lord, not to hear a call to repentance with its implicit assurance that the Lord would have mercy on them if they would repent. Fleeing, Jonah sailed for Spain. When the ship was threatened by a severe storm, Jonah was identified as the cause of all this and was thrown overboard. He was swallowed by a great fish the Lord had prepared. He was kept alive inside the fish, and, when he repented and prayed for the Lord's forgiveness and help, he was vomited by the fish upon the seashore. Having learned his lesson, Jonah was ready to do things God's way—even if it resulted in God's being merciful to Israel's enemies.

While some scholars consider the story of Jonah a parable, the story is a true, historical, dramatic and miraculous display of the depth of the Lord's concern even for nations who do not know Him. Jesus' comparing Himself to Jonah, using Jonah's experience in the fish's belly as a type of His burial, makes it impossible to think of Jonah in less than historical terms (see Matthew 12:38–41). Jesus' own words compel us to see the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah as real people who had really repented as a result of the real preaching of a real Jonah, who had spent three days inside a real sea creature.

182. What does it say about Nineveh that it was “three days’ journey in breadth”?

Jonah proclaimed, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Because of the Hebrews’ tendency to speak in concrete terms, “forty days” is seen as implying “a time long enough to accomplish what is intended.” Here, since it is used as a deadline in connection with an urgent warning, a specific amount of time appears to have been meant.

183. How could one man’s preaching have such impact on a powerful pagan people?

184. What is the point of their calling for a fast and putting on sackcloth?

185. The changeless God is described here and in some other places in the Scriptures as “relenting,” “repenting,” and “changing His mind” about things. How do you feel about this kind of anthropomorphism?

186. Under what circumstances has God been happy to “change His mind” about His judgment of our sins?

187. How does this Old Testament lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

### **The Epistle for the Day: 1 Corinthians 7:29–35**

These words of Paul must be understood in the context of his giving apostolic advice to the Corinthian Christians “in view of the present distress,” the threat of official persecution of the Church (see 1 Corinthians 7:25–28).

Paul recognized marriage as part of the natural order and valued it as a blessing, a gift from the Creator, and even compared the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the Church (see Ephesians 5:22–33). Paul was not devaluing marriage with his “let those who have wives live as though they had none.” But so they could live in good order and in undivided devotion to the Lord in the face of severe testing, Paul was advising them to remain single if they were unmarried. He himself was an example of this, unmarried and only “anxious about the things of the Lord.” Paul, of course, recognized