

3rd Sunday- B Deacon Pat Hall

[JONAH 3:1-5, 10; 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31; MARK 1:14-20](#)

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012118.cfm>

*This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.*

Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.

So they left their father ... and followed him.

Such an immediate response! Some guy walks by, commands “come”, people leave their work and their families and they “follow”.

There has been no little speculation by commentators that Simon, Andrew, James and John must have known Jesus or about him or about his teachings before this. Some postulate a deeper and more involved relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist and, of course, these disciples of John. Some put forth that Jesus himself may have been a disciple of John. Some have said that everyone in Galilee knew everyone else or of everyone else. ⁱ

It is good and proper for us to wonder out loud about the significance of Scripture and about its hidden meanings. We do need to be careful, though, when we preach our wondering as if it was Truth.

I wonder that if any of these explanations are true, why did not Mark clue us in on the background? Why did Mark write this scene in such an abrupt and immediate manner? I wonder if it is so because it was a moment of truth.

Today, St. Paul tells us:

*I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out...
For the world in its present form is passing away.*

That was almost 2000 years ago when he wrote that to the Corinthians. What’s the rush?

Have you ever had a moment of truth? Have you ever been presented with a situation of “fish or cut bait”, of “do or die”? Have you ever been at a critical moment and your response was, “Hey, let’s not be hasty. If it’s important, it will still be important tomorrow.”

I say, let’s take a more critical look at “now”.

I had a friend, Tony, who was part of an R.C.I.A. team (that's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). He and his teammates would accompany prospective converts in their formation towards reception of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Communion. We served at a parish where there was a wide background in parishioners. Some families were all Catholic. Some families had parents of different religious backgrounds and I treated all with deference, respecting all for their conscience and choices.

Well, there was this one dad who was of Protestant background. He came with his wife every Sunday to Mass. He helped his wife raise their children in the Catholic faith. He is a good guy and we have good friendly relations.

One Sunday after Mass I witnessed a conversation between Tony and that dad. Tony went right up to him and used every bit of his 6'3" frame to ask of him,

Doncha think it's about time?!

Well the dad was visibly taken aback. He was put on his heels. He had a moment of shocked silence. He relaxed, reflected for some brief seconds and said,

Yes, it is.

He started R.C.I.A. and was confirmed at the next Easter Vigil.

My style? I'm afraid I would've been "deferencing and respecting" him to this day without ever offering him that moment of truth. Where would he have been at Easter Vigil if it had been left up to me?

Because of Tony, I have changed my style. If the Holy Spirit prompts me to challenge or to offer, I hope I won't say, "If it's important, it will be important tomorrow." Or even worse, to run away in the opposite direction like Jonah of our first reading. He provides a great character witness, truly human, as human as you and me in how we avoid "the call".

Our reading is of course a snippet from the Book of Jonah. The Book though is only 48 verses long and can be read in the length of time of a commercial break. I recommend that you sit and read the whole story.

We all remember Jonah as the one who was swallowed by the Great Fish and remained in its belly for three days. This was because he had received a calling from God to go and prophesy to the Ninevites to the East, but Jonah went the other direction to the West, which resulted in his correction with the Great Fish. Good heavenly persuasion to do as God calls, doncha think?

Jonah gratefully and reluctantly responds. He prophesies doom to the Ninevites for their sinful ways. Frankly, Jonah would just as well have the Ninevites destroyed as they were all Assyrians, hated by the Israelites for past oppressions.

To Jonah's chagrin, the Ninevites repent that very day. This is the immediacy that we have been talking about. Jonah is really disappointed that the Ninevites aren't wiped out, even though he had a prophetic role in their salvation. The rest of the story is God providing Jonah with an object lesson about God's mercy. I won't tell the end of the story in hopes you will pick it up and read it yourself.

Today is the day. We do not know about tomorrow. As your deacon, I am privileged to serve at St. Mary funerals. The stories of these good souls so often inspire me. They are of moms and dads, grandpas and grandmas, good Catholics and good Americans. Their stories tell of wonderful lives, of courage, not shrinking from their call, not knowing when their last day would be to honor that call.

*This is the time of fulfillment.
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Repent, and believe in the gospel.*

Come... follow

Doncha think it's about time?!

ⁱ John L. Pitch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle B*, p. 25