

**FR. JOHN'S HOMILY**  
**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 24, 2021**

*“Speak Lord, your servant is listening”*, is the prayer of Samuel that the Priest Eli asked him to pray when the Lord called him. It is a great prayer for us to pray often. We continue with the message of listening to the voice of God this weekend. When we listen to God’s word, our lives are different for the better. As Psalms 23 states, *“only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life”*. When one follows the voice of the Shepherd. The problem is we don’t always listen to the Shepherd’s voice. There are times we stray from the flock, and even at times resist the word and the will of God.

Resistance comes from our belief that we know the situation better than God. We must admit it is hard to surrender to God and His ways. It takes a lot of faith and trust. We can recall during the time of Moses how he resisted God’s plan at first or how the Israelites resisted with their lack of trust in God and His ways. And the stubbornness of heart and resistance of Pharaoh, that it took 10 plagues for him to soften his heart in letting the Israelites go. Then only a short time later, regret his decisions and send an army after the Israelites in the desert. Resistance to God has been around almost since the beginning of creation.

This is why at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry His message was repent and believe in the Good News. His beginning message was of repentance, to turn from sin and believe in the Good News. Repent means to change the direction of our thinking, which in turn will change the direction of our lives. This need for repentance meant the people of God have strayed far from the Lord and needed to hear His voice to come back to Him.

The First Reading today is the story of Jonah. Jonah received the word of God to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Instead we hear of Jonah running away and going the opposite direction. He was trying to get as far away as possible, wanting nothing to do with God or the city of Nineveh. Later, we will discover that Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh. Israelites and Assyrians at many times were enemies. We can’t blame him. Who would want to go to a sinful city with sinful people who were rebellious and disobedient and call them to repentance? They were the enemy of God. This is what the Lord was asking of him, to preach repentance in the city of Nineveh. While running away on the ship, the storm led to Jonah confessing he was running from God. Being thrown overboard and swallowed by the whale for three days led Jonah to understand more about God’s mercy. Back to where he started, he goes and begins preaching. Surprisingly the preaching of Jonah was heard. The whole city repented including the king, even down to the animals. Although Jonah did not want the city to repent but rather wanted it destroyed, we see that the people did respond to Jonah’s preaching. God relented his punishment toward them because they “repented” of their evil. Resisting was their way of life until they heard God through Jonah, then they turned their hearts back to God.

We need to hold this in our hearts: the people repented and God showed His mercy towards them. It is not God's intent to destroy, but instead to save His people. God responds to hearts that are humble. People that are humble learn to rely upon Him. This is what Jesus is looking for in the Gospel, for only humble hearts can truly, repent and believe in the Good News.

We return to Mark's Gospel this Sunday, and begin a continuous reading of Mark's Gospel until the Lenten season begins. The Gospel of Mark does not begin with a narrative about Jesus' birth. Instead Mark begins by reporting on the preaching of John the Baptist. John is described as the voice in the wilderness sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Immediately after describing the work of John the Baptist, Mark reports on Jesus' baptism and his temptation in the desert. Jesus' public ministry begins after the arrest of John the Baptist. Mark wants his readers to understand the important connection between the end of John the Baptist's ministry and the beginning of Jesus' own ministry.

From John to Jesus, the message is the same -- the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus' ministry is a continuation of the ministry of John the Baptist. Like John the Baptist, Jesus' pronouncement of the kingdom is a call to repentance. Jesus begins the time of fulfillment; the Kingdom of God is already here. This will be shown again and again, in Jesus' words, teachings, preaching, healing, miracles etc. Jesus' healings and forgiveness of sins are signs of the Kingdom of God at hand. Repent and believe in the Good News. So when we respond with this humility, we too are not far from the Kingdom of God.

Last week, we saw the more typical of first-century rabbinical schools for students to seek out rabbis, asking to be their disciples. Remember Andrew's question, "Jesus, where do you stay?" What Andrew was asking was, "Jesus, we would like to be your disciples". In Mark's Gospel, Jesus breaks with this tradition and invites his disciples to learn from him. Jesus is said to have first called four fishermen—Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Simon and Andrew are brothers. Jesus promises that he will make them "fishers of men." James and John are also brothers. Mark does not report Jesus' words of invitation to them, but he does report that they left their fishing immediately. Their father, Zebedee, was left behind in the boat. What is amazing about these fisherman is their willingness to follow Jesus. Here at the beginning of Jesus ministry, these first apostles show no resistance.

Are we this free to respond to God and His call? Is there resistance in us? Can we respond like the fishermen today, and put aside anything and everything to follow Jesus? As we answer these questions, it is good to remember that in Jesus there was no resistance at any time to His Father's will. He was the innocent Lamb of Sacrifice to have suffered and died upon the cross for our salvation. Three days later, he would give us the gift of Eternal Life. The Kingdom of God is here and now. The time of fulfillment is at hand. Speak Lord, your servant is listening.