

### Homily on the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Respect for life. - 2021

[Jon 3:1-5, 10](#); [Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#); [1 Cor 7:29-31](#); [Mk 1:14-20](#)

Dearly beloved, this weekend, we celebrate the precious gift of life, life from the very moment of conception to natural death. Our Catholic Church teachings proclaim first and foremost that human life is sacred; each human life is created in the image and likeness of God, and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. Not only is this our teaching, but it is also natural law. We therefore, are called to continually work, to defend and protect human life, not only because it is right, but also because it is through our baptismal calling we are mandated to accept this mission on behalf of the Christ and His church. (cf. UCCB Website)

Saint John Paul II stated very clearly in *“The Gospel of Life,”* that “Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh, is entrusted to the maternal care of the church. Therefore, every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the church’s very heart ... and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature” [EV, 3.]

Unfortunately, however, there are traces of abuse and disregard for human life all around us. We see the atrocity on human life at “abortion mills”, established spread across the different States and counties. We see human life abused and disregarded in nursing homes, where the old and the frail are ignored or warehoused or so often treated as burdens. We see human life abused and disregarded, where children are taunted or bullied and in some extreme cases caged. We see human life abused and disregarded in laboratories, where embryos are treated like commodities to be harvested, instead of lives to be nurtured. We see human life abused and disregarded within many cultures around the world. In other societies euthanasia is being legitimized; another way to freely exercised choice.

Another factor that also affect the quality of life is poverty. The church encourages husbands and wives to plan their families using the natural family planning methods. By so doing they are able to offer them the quality of life befitting their image as children of God.

St. John Paul II said, “To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop” [EV, 100]. All lives should therefore be cherished and preserved.

The first reading from the prophet Jonah, has only four chapters. Like many of us, Jonah never expected to hear the word of the Lord quite so clearly, let alone be His agent to bring about the conversion of a nation. The first mission of Jonah occurs in exactly two sentences. "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go at once to

*Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me."*

We all know how the story unfolds. He tried to abandon the mission and run away. He ended up being swallowed by a whale or a big fish. Having little options, he repented and undertook the mission. Lo and behold, contrary to what he had envisioned, happened; the whole nation converted. Human as we are, like Jonah, we put some people or a group of people outside and beyond the mercy and grace of God. For some reasons we develop a strong conviction that some person can never change; we may believe that not even God can change them.

For the past 4 years, I have witnessed how some people deliberately did not give your former president any chance and opportunity for any good. I could experience this in my interaction with people; the media; and many more. A nation divided by race and politics. In reaction and response, he ended making some mistakes that obviously affected everyone in the nation.

Now, we are in another era. Will the division enlarge or will it be bridged? I honestly do not know, if you ask me. But I know one thing, that the mercy and grace of God is extended towards everyone. Like Jonah, you and I are called to make the effort and leave the transformation to God. Someone had said, "If there is a man/woman to pray and act, there is a God to listen and grant results." I, therefore call on you dearly beloved, regardless of your political affiliation, religious beliefs and convictions, which may be different from the current administration, you owe it to yourselves and to one another to support them, through your prayers.

Do not simply discredit or write him off as others did during Trumps time, as president. Yes, God decries His stand on abortion as the church has always taught. The same way and manner He decried the wickedness of Nineveh. But then, If only Jonah, at the command of God, could bring about the healing and transformation of the whole nation, how much more would our collective support and prayers bring about the needed change and transformation we all desire.

The ending of this book, of Jonah is something we need to revisit. Jonah, whose paltry preaching brought the great and powerful of Nineveh to their knees in conversion, is now furious at God, and the two finally have it out. Jonah speaks: "Lord! Didn't I know this would happen? Didn't I try to get away to Tarshish just to keep this from happening? Didn't I know that you are so ridiculously merciful, always forgiving the evil done by people like these Ninevites when in fact they should have been punished? It doesn't make any sense, and I wish I were dead."

And with these words Jonah storms out of the city into the parched wilderness, where he sits down to brood and pout. It's hot. God, in His abundant mercy, had even placed a plant to come up and shade Jonah from the heat. Then, He lets it die during the night. The

following day, God sends a scorching sun and a hot wind and Jonah has no shade, no protection.

And so we come to the last exchange between Jonah and the Lord. The Lord asks: "Jonah, are you angry about the shade plant that died in the night?" Jonah answers, "Yes I am, mad enough to die." And God has this last word: "Jonah, that plant sprang up, lived and died without any work on your part and yet you are now furious because the plant died. Should I the Lord not be concerned for the good of the people of Nineveh? Are they not my people too?"

Beloved, unless we learn to accept how God cherishes the life of all He had made; from conception to death, and learn to forgive one another from the depths of our hearts; and see each one as a brother or a sister, as in the words of Martin Luther King (1964) "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

The words of Jesus as He begins his ministry becomes critical; "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." We all need a change of heart to be able to live in peace and prosperity as one people.