

SUNDAY 03 – YEAR B

“Change Your Belief System”

(Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 25; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20)

(Adapted from a homily by Flor McCarthy, *New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies*)

John Cardinal Newman once said, “To live is to change; to have lived well is to have changed much.”

The best way to experience the Kingdom of God is through faith and repentance.

Jesus began his public mission with the call: “Repent, and believe the Good News.” Who was this call to repentance directed to? While it was directed to sinners in the first place, it was in fact directed at everyone, even those who see themselves as good.

Jesus had more trouble with good people than with sinners. Why? The hardest people of all to convert are the good, because they don't see any need of conversion. It's hard enough to get those who are ill to go to the doctor, but try getting those who are convinced they are well to go! Sinners who openly admitted they were sinners didn't cause Jesus the same trouble.

To answer the call to repentance one must feel a certain dissatisfaction with oneself and have a longing for something better. There must be a sense that something is wrong, or at least that something is missing. The conversion experience begins with the realization that we are not what we could and should be. This realization is the first stage of a process, the first step of a journey.

To take on board the call to repentance demands openness, honesty, humility and above all courage – the courage to put an end to self-deception and confront a painful reality. The courage to admit one's guilt, ask for forgiveness and resolve to change. People can become so set in their ways, so sunk in their ruts, that it's almost impossible to move them. There is a saying, “Some people have been in a rut so long they think they are in a groove.”

I used that line once when visiting with a husband who was not speaking to his sister-in-law, a situation that had existed painfully for years. He immediately accused me of saying that he was in a rut. His son jumped into the conversation with the comment, “No dad, you are in a trench!” We all gently tried to help him see how harmful his actions were to all the family, but the result was only him getting up and leaving the table. There was simply no ability within him to see his own reality.

Some people can see a better future and still won't move. They realize that this future can't be achieved in the twinkling of an eye or by means of a magic wand. They realize that the road forward will be long and the progress slow and painful. The present self can't dwell in the house of the future; only a transformed self can. This is why some people opt to stay as they are.

Repentance is often presented as a hard, negative and sad thing, as if it merely consisted in feeling guilty about one's sins and doing penance for them. In reality, repentance is a very positive thing. True, to repent is to admit that all is not well with oneself. But it is also to discover something wonderful about oneself, namely, that one has potentialities which one didn't know one had. It means acquiring a new vision, taking a new direction setting oneself more worthwhile goals, living by better values. In a word, it opens the way to a new life. Understood like this, repentance is exciting and always leads to joy.

To repent means to be converted. Conversion is the starting point of every spiritual journey, and is a prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom of God. The Christian life is a continuous process of conversion.

One of my conversion moments came during a leadership course that I was giving once with a team. I became aware that one of the team members had become very silent and was not speaking to me at all. I felt quite uncomfortable and afraid, unsure about what was going on. Finally, driving home with her in silence on the third day of the course, I asked her if anything was wrong. She asked me if I really wanted to know. When I replied that I did, she told me in no uncertain terms for the next half hour how upset she was at my behavior during the course we were giving. Whatever the others would do, it seemed that I would do something to undermine it or change it, as if it wasn't good enough.

I could perhaps have defended myself, but I could not argue with her feelings. By this time in my journey, I had learned the importance of self awareness. I realized once again my tendency to control and judge others when I am under a bit of pressure especially, and this course was my responsibility. I asked her what I needed to do to change, and she replied simply, "Change your belief system." She went on to ask if I really believed that my way was the only way, the best way. Did I not see that someone else's way could be just as effective. I had to eat humble pie, admit that she was right, and set about the process of praying about and seeking healing for my tendency to control and insist on my own way. That was a conversion moment for me.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a mystery of transformation. Through the faith and prayer of the presider and the community, and the power of the Holy Spirit, humble gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, who is love and forgiveness.

May our celebration of this mystery help to transform us into the likeness of Christ. May we enter more fully into the Kingdom of God through faith and repentance.