

Words to Ponder: *Messages from the Pulpit*

Readings for January 22, 2012, from *the Word among us...*
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time: Jon. 3:1-5, 10; Ps. 25; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Mk. 1:14-20

1.21.12: Stella Maris Chapel... Father Ralph Jones [audio recording]

“May the reading of his most holy word cast out our sins. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent! And believe the gospel. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“There certainly are two distinct kingdoms: one of God almighty and the other of the devil himself. They are as different as night is to day.

“The devil, we are told in sacred scripture, comes only to steal, to kill, and [to] destroy. As ruler of his kingdom, what all he does is govern by doubt, disbelief, dishonesty, deceit, dysfunctionality, disobedience, dissolute living, depression, death, and damnation. All *d*'s, aren't they? All of his efforts into the building and propagating of his kingdom with all of its disobedient and stark rebellion against God [is] what it's all about. He's the one described in sacred scripture as the one who comes like a roaring lion, desiring who he may devour.

“All those who say yes to him become fearful and then enter the narrow slope downward into darkness. They are only pleasure seekers, only delighting in themselves; and their motto should be eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. There's nothing else to do. If it's pleasure, do it! They are *now* oriented, not seeing or accepting the big picture. There is a heaven to gain; there is a hell to avoid. There surely is death, judgment, and then the final disposition.

“Now Joshua, one of our heroes from the Old Testament, and others wisely say, ‘As for ourselves, we choose to serve the Lord.’ They do that by first having knowledge of God's most holy word; then by obedience to his commands and his instructions; and, third, for love of God, love of neighbor, and love of [oneself].

“Yes. The kingdom of God is not of this world, just as Jesus told Pontius Pilate when he quizzed him about it. It is diametrically opposite to the kingdom of the devil and the interest of this world. It is *life* producing. It's *love* engendering. It's *liberty* sustained. It is just as holy scripture and the catechism state from Romans 14:16-17; and I quote, ‘For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.’

“Yes, the kingdom of God is within you. That is, if you're born again. That is, if you're walking in the will and the way of God.

“Since we by physical birth have inherited a fallen nature, in order to be brought into the kingdom of God, we all must be born again. John 3:3 quote, ‘Truly, truly, I say unto you, except the man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ This is a choice which is before us at all times.

“We can accept the kingdom of the devil and all that comes with it, or we can accept the kingdom of God and all that comes with it. We all who have our heads screwed on right need to copy the example of Joshua as of old in the Old Testament who, when presented with the choice, said, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’

“The consequences of our free choice are laid out clearly before us by God almighty who says, ‘I place before you this day life or death, cursing and blessing; and the choice is yours. Choose life that you might live.

“The sacred scripture we read, quote, ‘God wills all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth’ [1 Timothy 2:4]. Isn’t that what that cross is about? Isn’t that why he came? He said, ‘I come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the way, the truth, and the light. No one comes to the Father except through me.’

“Now he does not wish for any to perish. That’s pretty clear from the cross, isn’t it? I think it is. That is why God, in seeing the evil in the king and in all the people of Nineveh, as you heard in the first reading, and all in the kingdom of the evil one [where] they were living, and not wanting any of them to perish—as happened with the disobedient ones in the day of Noah, the sexually perverse individuals in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah—he dispatched Jonah, a prophet, to warn the people of Nineveh of impending disaster and total doom and damnation. They all needed to confess, to repent, to get right with God. Continuing in the kingdom of the devil spelled certain judgment and damnation.

“What happened?

“They received the message of God, forsook their sins, put on sackcloth and ashes, did penance, and thereby entered the kingdom of God; and judgment was withheld.

“Now, since God is not a respecter of persons, we all, every one of us, need to ask ourselves in what kingdom are our thoughts, our choices, our behaviors, our very lifestyle today? [Two,] make a clear decision to forsake, to confess all known sin, thereby getting right with God and avoiding judgment. Three, facilitate the salvation of others—we all have others connected in our lives; we all have networks of one kind or another—by warning them of impending judgment, as Jonah did, and the evil of what you see them or know them to be doing.

“This is a major fault today. The college student will tell their parents, ‘I’m moving in with Sheila.’

“‘Oh, okay. You know I don’t approve of it, but okay. We’ll help you move in.’

“You lost the battle right there.

“The story of Jonah and the whale is not about you being swallowed up by a whale but rather—look at it carefully—of the judgment that came upon him through his disobedience and the confession and forgiveness by God that gave him a second chance.

“God spoke to him. God told him to go to Nineveh and warn the people because he did not want to destroy them. And what did he do?

“‘Yes, God!’

“He got in the boat and went in the opposite direction.

“Then a judgment came upon that boat. They were swamped in water and ready to break up. They threw all sorts of things overboard and all their shipment and things.

“Finally, [the men] said, ‘It must be something in him.’

“Jonah said, ‘Yeah. It was me. Toss me over.’

“[The men] did, and they saved their lives.

“Then Jonah was swallowed up in the whale. He was swallowed up in judgment; and, while in the whale for those three days, he had a chance to think things over. He had time to confess; and then, when he got right with God, [the whale spit him out]. He ended up on the beach as far as we know.

“[Today the] truth of God’s word is being suppressed or made fun of. [So] few of the so-called born again Christians are not standing up and speaking out for the word of God and what is decent and right.

“We wink, [and] we smile at all the nudity, pornography, and things... on TV, on the radio, and so forth. We keep our lips zipped and say nothing when Christians [are criticized]. [We aren’t] warning those [we] encounter who are in sin and headed in the wrong direction. We need to speak up and speak out.

“Many a young man and a young woman assume that you’re giving them license to do it because you didn’t stand against their bad choice. By your silence or by your disallowing them to do it, you didn’t stand. And it’s hard!

“I know parents.... Here’s an example. This lady shared with me, ‘You know, Father, it was awful. We raised our son in the Catholic church. He fell in love with this young lady. [Neither] had been married before, so they could get married in the church. They decided to get married on the beach in Jersey City.... They said they were going to have a Protestant minister... and they wanted us to be there. ‘Of course, if you refuse to come, we’ll not talk to you again; [and] you’ll never see your grandchildren.’ That was a hard decision, and they decided on the right side, that they would not attend and give them their blessing. Finally, the children came around; and I know another [family] the same way from... Corpus Christi.

“Remember, if you fail to warn those who are in the error of deep sinfulness, God, according to the Bible, will hold *you* responsible for their blood. If you fail to do so, he may have *you* consumed by a whale of a problem as he did Jonah—in judgment with no escape, except through confession and getting right the pledge.

“So today we are thinking of the kingdoms. When we say, ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,’ we’re acknowledging—aren’t we—that it’s not totally here. We’re acknowledging that his will is not being done; and we are, in essence, saying, ‘God, help us, so this will take place.’

“We all have been rebellious. We all are stiff-necked people as the Jewish people were, so we’re all in need of his forgiveness. We’re all in need of shaking up, talking up, and walking out of the sinful lifestyles into the glory, power, and presence of God.

“Amen?”

“Amen!”

Thank you, Jesus, for calling me to be your disciple. With joy, knowing my life will never be the same, I take up your call. I trust that you will be with me (the Word among us, January 2012, p. 42).