

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

21st January 2024 - 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Jonah 3:1-5,10. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. **Gospel:** Mark 1:14-20.

We're used nowadays to seeing reporters out on the streets at incidents reporting what is going on, and as news items moving from one thing to another, today of course across the world, and often at great speed.

St Mark's gospel can very much read like a quick news item. Mark will be our guide for most Sundays of the year. His is the first and shortest gospel. He is the underestimated genius who, under divine inspiration created a whole new form of sacred literature. He was the pioneer evangelist, the first to capture into a coherent story the encounter of God and humanity which took place in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

He brought together the various spoken and written memoirs of Jesus, editing them and wrote them into the form of an engaging story. His writing is simple but mysterious, consoling yet challenging. It has been maintained from the very early days that he had access to the memories of Simon Peter.

Mark writes with the haste and directness of a reporter who knows that he has a good story and wants to get it out. Forty-one times we find him jumping ahead to the next incident with a link word like immediately or straightaway. Mark avoids all superfluous details as he carries the reader along at breathless pace into vivid pictures and dramatic action. His pages are teeming with people, and he keeps us in touch with their emotional reactions to what was happening.

As we reflect with Mark throughout the year we will be confronted especially with the mystery of the cross in the life of Jesus and with the struggles of the disciples in their growth of faith. We will find here no dishonest pretence that all is easy and happy for those who follow Jesus.

Mark courageously faces the growing pains, struggles and contradictions of all who follow the teacher whose way led to Calvary. Perhaps Mark, with his stark message of the cross, is the evangelist for a pampered age, when people have been given false expectations of worldly happiness and total self-gratification as much by half-baked preachers as by the allurements of endless advertising and the beguiling promises of technical progress.

These false expectations of life have left far too many people unable to cope with hard reality. A spineless generation needs to hear again the good news of the cross: the news that God can be found on the crosses of life.

Today's short passage introduces us to two of the great themes of this gospel. Jesus is one who teaches the world with power and authority about the kingdom of God. He proclaims that the reign of God is breaking in on the world, calling us to follow him.

This is the news of a radical break from the old ways of sin before we can enter into a new way of living. To break from the old way is to **repent**: and to break into the new way is to **believe**. First hear the word of God and then, in its light turn away from the sinful ways of the past, just as the people of Nineveh heard the peaching of Jonah and renounced their evil behaviour.

The first disciples lead the way because when they heard the call of Jesus they left their nets, occupations and families to follow him. And so commences the second part of Mark's great story, the path of discipleship. A long and oftentimes painful road through the year.

Mark's point is that the call to discipleship begins at the very start of Jesus' preaching. Week-by-week we will be carried along by the God-news of how Jesus challenged the world and how the world re-acted.

As Mark spins his story, he invites us to put ourselves on the stage and see where we are in the story. For the story of discipleship is intended to be my story and yours.