

January 24, 2021
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
1 Cor 7:29-31
Mk 1:14-20

REQUIREMENTS TO ENTER – REPENT AND BELIEVE!

Many decades ago, when I was in high school attending a Catholic school, I remember that one of the rules in our 'students' manual' was on **school uniform** and **identification card**. This rule was so important that in our school gate there was a big sign that says: **NO UNIFORM! NO ID! NO ENTRY!** Clearly, the message conveyed to the students the importance of those requirements prior to entering the school premises.

With this pandemic we are in, it has been the 'new normal' that before we enter a public building/establishment like the grocery stores and, even churches, we have to wear our mask. Most of the public building doors we will see reminders like: **BEFORE ENTERING THE BUILDING, PLEASE WEAR YOUR MASK! NO MASK! NO ENTRY!** This basic requirement is not only to protect ourselves from the virus but also to show that we care for the other not to catch the virus as well. Thus, here in our Church, since we re-opened on May 31, 2020, we are requiring the faithful to wear a mask, observe the social distancing and help in sanitizing the Church. Generally, the faithful are compliant with the basic health protocols we are implementing here in our parish. Thanks be to God!

In our gospel proclaimed we heard Jesus starting to do his ministry after John the Baptist, his cousin, was arrested. In doing his ministry, he proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom and begun calling people to work with him. In proclaiming the Good News, he explicitly mentioned two important requirements in order to receive the kingdom of God. **What are these requirements to enter the kingdom of God?** Listen again to what he said: **"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."**

Repent and believe in the Gospel! These are the two important steps to receive the kingdom of God. However, prior to repenting and believing in the Gospel, the need to hear his call is non-negotiable. **How can a person repent if he does not hear and heed the call? How can a person's belief in the Gospel deepened and practiced if he does not listen regularly/systematically to God's voice?**

The Lord Jesus' call to **repent and believe in the Gospel** is tendered to us at this very moment. **How are we going to respond to it?** To have a better response to his call, I would like to shed light on the words – **repent and believe**. **First**, let us take a look at the word 'repent.' I would like to impart again the story that I shared last January 11, 2021 to simplify what it means to repent.

There was a young woman who when to a church and expressed her desire to join them. The pastor came and had conversation with her. The pastor asked, "**Were you a sinner?**" The young woman answered, "**Yes.**" The pastor continued, "**Are you still a sinner?**" "**Yes.**" she replied. "**Then what real changes have taken place in your life?**" the pastor inquired. The young woman said, "**The best way I can explain it, is that I used to be a sinner running after sin, but now I'm a sinner running away from sin.**"

The story clearly tells us the true meaning of repentance. True repentance is truly a decisive and deliberate act. It is a change from within; a transformative change of heart; a spiritual conversion. In Greek, it is called: "**metanoia.**" And so we ask ourselves: **Are we deliberate in changing our sinful ways? What changes from within are we longing to do today?**

What about the call to 'believe in the Gospel?' The word 'believe' is defined by the dictionary as '**accepting a statement of someone as true.**' To 'believe' is tantamount '**to having faith.**' It is interesting to note that in the English grammar the word 'believe' is an '**action verb.**' Hence, '**believing or having faith**' is something that needs to be acted upon. It is not something inactive or motionless.

From a biblical point of view, the word 'believe' is '**more than simply agreeing in our minds that something might be true. It means "trust" — that we believe so strongly in God that we are willing to commit our lives to Him and live the way we know He wants us to live.**' A good example of a true believer is Abraham who faithfully followed God's instruction. When God asked him to offer his son, Isaac, he obeyed. God saw Abraham's commitment and faith. Thus, God made **Abraham** the '**father of many nations;**' the '**father of faith.**'

To believe in the Gospel means **we have to be people of faith doing action for the sake of God's kingdom.** We cannot claim that 'we believe' and then do nothing about the Gospel. We cannot claim that 'we believe' and then ignore the call to be stewards of the Gospel. We cannot claim that 'we believe' and then we insist on doing our own will and not His will. We cannot claim that 'we believe' and then keep on holding on to resentment and arrogance. We cannot claim that 'we believe' and then ignore the call to run away from sin. We cannot claim 'we believe' and then just pick and choose what we want from the Gospel proclaimed and disregard the others. St. Augustine has this stark reminder to all of us when he said: "**If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.**"

As we continue our celebration, we pray for the grace to have the humility to repent; the courage to run away from sin; and the fervor to give witness to the Gospel.

God bless us all!