

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Don’t Be Late!”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And so, a priest (let’s call him Fr. O’Malley) celebrated his 25th anniversary as pastor of a small parish in rural Montana. The mayor of that village was supposed to hold a speech at the beginning, but as always he had more important matters at hand. So, the priest started with his speech.

He said, “I know how worried I was 25 years ago when I came to this village. The first man to confess, I will not name him, told me that he committed fraud on his taxes, shoplifted from the local grocery store and had five additional children from a secret affair.”

As the priest came to an end, the mayor finally arrived and happily began his speech: “What a great day to celebrate. Such wonderful memories! Did any of you know that I was the first parishioner to confess to Father O’Malley?” The moral of this story? Never be late!

I love that joke. However, I think we have all had the experience of being late to this, that or the other thing. Most of us probably can remember a time that, as a student, we stayed up until 3 PM to get ready for an exam only to accidentally sleep in. I think we all can remember a time when we procrastinated on something too long only to find ourselves panicking once the deadline drew near. If you ever had the habit of being late a lot to things, and I am the first to confess my guilt, the readings this Sunday are very helpful.

Jonah tells the people of Nineveh in our first reading, “40 days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed”. Now, how is that for a deadline? St. Paul tells us in our second reading, “I tell you brothers and sisters that time is running out.” Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading, “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel”. It is as if the Church is trying to tell us this weekend: stop procrastinating, time is short, act now and don’t be late!

And I believe this is a very good reminder. You see, we all have had to deal with deadlines either at work or at school. What we don’t do so well at times is seeing the forest through the trees. There are matters in life that we simply shouldn’t procrastinate on. For example, what good is it to get a promotion at work but end up failing our family in the process? What good is it to prosper financially in our society but end up spiritually impoverished in the end? What good is it to get an A in the classroom but then get an F in life? Therefore, the Church is reminding us this weekend to get our priorities straight because we don’t have all the time in the world.

How do we begin? Jesus tells us that we begin by repenting and believing the Gospel. I have shared with you before that the English word “Repent” isn’t as revealing as the original Greek word here. (You all remember it, don’t you?) *Metanoia* is the Greek word here. “Meta” means transcend and “nous” means mind. And so “repent” in this sense is a challenge for us to transcend our current way of thinking and to see ourselves and the world around us in light of the Kingdom, through Jesus’ eyes.

Look, no one has ever made a positive change in their life without first changing their vision, recognizing what isn’t working. We need to allow God to change our hearts so we can envision the change that needs to happen. We need to believe in that new vision enough so to do it, even to suffer for it. That is what *metanoia* means. The Holy Spirit will inspire us and gives us all the grace we need to achieve our vocations, but if we don’t change our mindsets, believe in Jesus’ vision for us, and act on that worldview, we will just continue to spin our wheels.

And so, I think it is helpful that the Church rolls out readings like we have this Sunday every so often to remind us of Jonah’s words to the people of Nineveh, “40 days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed”, to remind us of what St. Paul tells us in our second reading, “I tell you, brothers and sisters, that time is running out”, and to remind us of Jesus’ words in our Gospel reading, “This is the time of fulfillment.” Not a week from now, not a year from now, this is the time of fulfillment. “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel”.

My friends, ask yourself what does Jesus’ invitation mean for you right now, today, this moment? What does this message mean for your family and what you see to be your priorities? The invitation this Sunday is to stop procrastinating on what is most important, namely your salvation. Get moving, embrace the vision of the Kingdom, embrace the vision God has for you, and for the love of God, don’t be late.