

### 3RD SUNDAY IN O.T. - B

There are twenty-four days until Ash Wednesday.

I mention this because of the proclamation made by Jesus in the Gospel: "Repent and believe in the Gospel."

Repentance is at the heart of the season of Lent, as well as being the daily vocation of a Christian.

The Greek word for "repentance" is *metanoia*, which literally means "to change one's mind," or we could say "to change our hearts."

Lent calls us to both reflection and action as we seek to change whatever in our lives does not match up with our belief in the Gospel.

We also heard the account of the repentance of the people of Nineveh in response to the preaching of Jonah.

Notice the reference to forty days. This number forty calls to mind the length of the great Flood as well the forty years of the Exodus in the desert.

Both of these periods of time brought about a change in people's relationship with God.

Jesus spent forty days in the desert after his Baptism in the Jordan.

That is why Lent is referred to as "forty days."

Threatened with destruction by God because of their sins, the people of Nineveh didn't wait.

They immediately "turned away from their evil way" of paganism as they fasted and put on sackcloth.

During the next three weeks we will be anticipating our annual forty day pilgrimage of repentance through the holy season of Lent.

Anyone who wants to set out on a pilgrimage must have a plan lest they miss out on the beautiful, life-transforming opportunities their journey will present them with.

Each year the Church invites us to take up the tools of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Besides what we already do as part of our ordinary spiritual life, we should be asking ourselves how we will incorporate these tools in this year's observance of Lent.

Last year, Lent was interrupted by the COVID outbreak.

Our lives were turned upside down and perhaps we lost track of the usual milestones of the Lenten season.

This year, we can safely come to Sunday Mass, participate in Stations of the Cross, and even come to the weekly evening of reflection we will be offering.

On a more personal dimension, what special devotions or Scripture readings can we incorporate into our daily prayer?

Is there something we can "give up" in addition to the sacrifices of fasting and abstinence required by the Church?

And how will we become more charitable in terms of the time, treasure, and talent we devote to specific almsgiving as part of the discipline of Lent.

Remember that "discipline" does not mean punishment; rather it refers to whatever practices help us to learn.

In the case of Lent, the learning to which we are called has to do with the change of heart required to conform us more and more to the mind of Christ.

The people of Nineveh responded wholeheartedly to the preaching of Jonah.

The men in the Gospel responded wholeheartedly to Jesus' invitation to become "fishers of men."

May our response to the call of Lent to follow Christ more closely be wholehearted as well.

In the Gospel Jesus declares, "This is the time of fulfillment; the kingdom of God is at hand," and in the second reading St. Paul says that "the time is running out."

There is an urgency to these announcements.

Paul reminds us that "the world in its present form is passing away."

Lent challenges us to set our priorities straight: "Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return."

So let's begin now to prepare for the beautiful opportunity Lent provides us with reflect more deeply upon and believe more earnestly in the Good News Jesus came to bring.