

## Homily for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2018

During the week we celebrated Mass with the staff of our schools, St Joseph's Primary and St Johns College. With them I related a conversation I had only a few days ago. I was talking with a teacher whom I had not seen for a number of years. I asked if she were planning her retirement as she was now getting on in years. She said no, because she was still enjoying teaching and being enriched by it. And she felt she still had much to share with the children to their benefit. In other words teaching was one of the core values along with her marriage which gave purpose and meaning to her life. That is not to say there were no great challenges, hard work, mistakes and failures along the way. Initially she may not have seen her choices in life as her vocation but that is certainly what they turned out to be.

We are presented with several vocations in the liturgy today. First the call to Jonah to preach to the Ninevites. Then Jesus call to his first disciples. There is an urgency about both of those events. God has important work for us to do. He is direct, "Go Jonah," and to the disciples "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Mark in announcing Jesus at the start of his Gospel is in today's terminology proclaiming a "regime change" with the coming of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is a new regime in the world.

When we have regime changes in a county the second ruler is often no better or worse than the first. One dictator is replaced by another and so on. Nor is the new regime in Jesus to be a theocracy. Taking God's reign literally in human terms has led some religions to insist that civil society is ruled by God through a priestly cast. So the king becomes a priest or the priest becomes a king. Some Islamic states are like that. Judaism also struggled with it too (cf 1 Samuel 8). And in medieval times the Catholic Church was like that when popes were secular rulers as well as religious. But as Jesus says, "My kingdom is not from this world." God does not reign as human rulers do. This is some good news! But our real struggle to change is with our internal ruler, our ego, which has such a hold on us. It keeps hold of our sight and our ears. To achieve regime change there is the challenge.

The Church speaks of a universal call to holiness (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* V, 39). We all have that vocation, each and everyone of us. Holiness is by no means just the absence of sin. It is a life focused on what enables us to become the people God wants us to be. It is to enter into the fullness of divine life that God wants to share with us. And we will not always get it right as we work it out.

Be aware, then, that the person sitting beside you right now, or even perhaps the person you pass in the street, has been given a call, a vocation to participate in this creative work of God, to enable God's plan come to fruition in the world. We find it hard to take that on board. As Jesus remarked, we have ears but don't hear, we see but are blind (cf Mark 4:11). However, as Pope Francis said recently, "We must not wait to be perfect before responding to the Lord who calls us, but rather open our hearts to His voice" (13<sup>th</sup> January 2018).

God's reign in the world begins with repentance. We must repent, or literally, change one's mind. We have to change our minds about what is really important. We have to see differently what is before our very eyes. Hear and touch differently what we hear and touch every day.

Our vocation, made as we are in the image and likeness of our creator loving God, is a creative embrace of life, the world, our neighbour and God. We were called by name at our Baptism by God to use all our gifts so that God's justice may reign in the world.

Like Samuel, who sought the help of Eli in last Sunday's reading (1 Samuel 3:3-10), we need others to help us discern both who we are and who calls us. Being members of the Body of Christ we have that responsibility to each other to help us discern the path to life. Is it Christ calling us? Relying on our self alone we will surely get it wrong. We mistake our own ambition for God's plan. Living within that community of faith and embracing its life that path can be revealed to us.

Fr Graham Gatehouse