

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – B

As we continue thinking about the opening of Jesus public ministry we hear Mark's account of how Jesus called Simon and his brother Andrew and then the two sons of Zebedee James and John, they were fishermen but for Christ they will not catch fish but men. The first reading where Jonah preaches repentance

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Jonah. This book should be treated like the parables in the NT because this book is not history but narrative, a tale which carries a message. The hero of the story is Jonah a disobedient prophet who struggles to evade his divine mission and then complains to God when after some very odd happenings his mission is successful. 'Nineveh, the great city' was destroyed in 612 but the book was not written until after the return from Exile, sometime in the fourth century. Further against the book's historicity there is no trace in history of the conversion of the king of Nineveh and his people to the God of Israel. So what does this narrative teach? That prophecy must not be interpreted too rigidly, that even the most dire threats from God are an expression of the merciful will of God who pardons at the first sign of repentance. Jonah preaches destruction but his threats are conditional and at the first sign of repentance, of conversion God's will is achieved and Joel's mission is accomplished. Again we learn that even the pagans can receive God's mercy, God is God not only of the Jews but also God of the gentiles. The reading, 3.1-5,10, comes just after Jonah has been vomited onto dry land by the fish. Jonah has once tried to evade the mission God gave him and the reading begins with God addressing Jonah again. He must go to the great city of Nineveh 'and preach to them as I told you.' Jonah carries out God's command and the people believe in God proclaim 'a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least' and God relents and will not punish the Ninevites as he had threatened.