



**Contributed by Fr. James M. Donohue, C.R.**

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**THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**January 24, 2021**

**GATHERING TIME** (10-15 Minutes)

**Introduction to the Word:**

If a “call” always involves moving toward something, it necessarily means that a “call” also involves leaving something behind. We see this clearly in our first reading and in our gospel stories. In order to follow God’s call to preach in Nineveh, Jonah must leave behind his own people. Similarly, in order to follow Jesus’ call to follow Him, Peter, Andrew, James, and John must leave behind their families and their way of life as fishermen. This same dynamic repeats itself for each of us as we try to respond to God’s call in our lives. We might think of people who feel called to embrace a partner in life and love so that they can begin their own families. We might think of people who feel called to serve in healthcare, education or public service, so that they can work to make the lives of others better. We might think of people who feel called to the single life, religious life or priesthood, so that they can devote themselves wholeheartedly to a relationship with Christ that “spills into” their service of others. It would seem that only the excitement and urgency and attractiveness of the “new” is what enables us to let go of the “old.”

One interesting aspect of being “called” is that the “call” never really stops. Or perhaps, to say it differently, one “call” seems to lead to another “call.” I remember how difficult it was for me to listen, to discern and to respond to God’s call to enter the seminary as a nineteen-year-old! It meant that I had to leave behind my scholarship for pre-med, and my dreams of being a medical doctor. I remember agonizing over this but, after making the decision, thinking that everything was settled. Little did I know that the “calls” were just beginning! Once I was in the seminary, there was another decision about priesthood as a diocesan priest or as a religious priest. Once I “settled” on the latter, there was the decision for me about the Franciscans or the Resurrectionists. Then, there was the ministry path as a Resurrectionist: educational ministry or



## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 Minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

### **FIRST READING:** (Jonah 3:1-5, 10)

The word of the Lord was addressed to Jonah: “Up!” he said “Go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach to them as I told you to.” Jonah set out and went to Nineveh in obedience to the word of God. Now Nineveh was a city great beyond compare: it took three days to cross it. Jonah went on into the city, making a day’s journey. He preached in these words, “Only forty days more and Nineveh is going to be destroyed.” And the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behaviour. And God relented: he did not inflict on them the disaster which he had threatened.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### **SECOND READING:** (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

Brothers, this is what I mean: our time is growing short. Those who have wives should live as though they had none, and those who mourn should live as those that had nothing to mourn for; those who are enjoying life should live as though there were nothing to laugh about; those whose life is buying things should live as though they had nothing of their own; and those who have to deal with the world should not become engrossed in it. I saw this because the world as we know it is passing away.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### **GOSPEL:** (Mark 1:14-20)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. “The time has come: he said “and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News”. As he was walking along by the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men.” And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending their nets. He called them at once and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

The Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Pause for a brief reflection on the scripture readings).*

## **COMMENTARY:**

**First Reading:** Jonah was a reluctant prophet who rebelled against God’s call to go to Nineveh. Instead, he took passage on a ship to escape, only to be thrown overboard when the stormy seas threatened the lives of all aboard the ship. Swallowed by a whale, Jonah realizes that God is too difficult to outrun. Finally, Jonah decides to go to Nineveh. Despite his half-hearted preaching—Jonah is not interested in the conversion of these pagans—the people of Nineveh repent. At this point, Jonah continues to reveal his “true colors” because he becomes angry that the people of

Nineveh responded to God! God chastises His reluctant prophet, pointing out that in contrast to Jonah's disregard for these people, God is "gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (Jonah 4:2).

**Second Reading:** St. Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, has a sense of urgency. He says, "The time is running out." I am sure that those are not the words we want to hear! Too easily we can think, "This message to repent and follow Jesus is not for me," or "I will get around to it someday." The time is now, and this is another occasion that God is using to reach out to us and bring us to Godself. God wants to fill us with His life, but sometimes we put it off, perhaps thinking that we can reach the same results without conversion, without change, without doing things differently. Life does not work that way. With that, we are only putting more obstacles in the way of the Lord to transform us, as did the first disciples – Peter and Andrew, James and John.

**Gospel Reading:** There is something profound in Jesus' calling of the disciples. It happens at the very beginning of the gospel, signalling that Jesus, from the outset, wishes to have collaborators in the proclamation of the reign of God. This is no solitary activity on Jesus' part. Rather, the great work of gathering people into God's reign requires many labourers: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38; Lk 10:2). We might note two other important points about the call of the disciples. First, the narrative underscores the importance of the nonprofessional. In addition to these fishermen, Jesus will call a tax collector, a Zealot, and other ordinary people. Second, there is a "personal immediacy" of discipleship. Just as Jesus calls each of these people, this "new thing" that is beginning can only be handed on from person to person. There is no automatic transfer of faith, for calling must be handed on face-to-face, through example and charisma.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:**

1. "*God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behaviour.*" (Jonah 3:1-5, 10)

The Book of Jonah chronicles the story of a reluctant prophet. Yet Jonah *did* respond to God's call, and his message led to the salvation of the people of Nineveh.

- a) Has there been a Jonah in our lives who brought us what we may have initially considered 'bad news,' but which, through the grace of God, became 'Good News?'
- b) What are some of the efforts we have made to renounce our evil behaviour? Who has helped us bring that about?
- c) Have we been a Jonah for others?

2. "*Our time is growing short*" (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

We live in a world in which so many things are completed in a moment in time. I think, particularly, of food preparation, when we just add water and stir. Real life is not like that! Real things, really important things, take time.

- a) How can we identify with St. Paul's message that "our time is growing short?"
- b) What are the excuses and ploys we have used to put off responding to God's grace and following Jesus faithfully?
- c) What ARE we waiting for?

3. *“The time has come ... and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News”.* (Mark 1:14-20)

Jesus calls us to a new life. But the Gospel reading makes it clear that the result of our listening will be to follow Him. That is the fruit of His call to which we respond.

- a) How has our following of Jesus deepened since we began praying with ‘Celebrating the Word’?
- b) What are some of the ways our response to the call to conversion has opened up the possibility to follow Jesus more intimately and sincerely?
- c) How are we modelling for others a faith-filled response to the call of Jesus?

## **CARING - PRAYING TIME**

1. **Word for the Week:** *“Follow me and I will make you into fishers of people.”*

2. **Suggestions for the Week:**

The call of God is not only for our own sanctification. God wants us to bear the fruit of the kingdom of God. One of the ways we do this is by our personal day-to-day testimony. This may take the form of something we have planned well, and articulated after great preparation. Or it may be completely spontaneous and an immediate response to something or someone. God is present in both! This week, having reflected and shared on your own transformation in Christ, be more conscious of your opportunities to bring others to a deeper transformation in Christ. We must be patient, as others have been patient with us, but we must be diligent and consistent in leading others – by word and example – to a deeper life in Jesus. Then we too are “fishers” and are bringing our family, friends, co-workers, neighbours and acquaintances to a fuller and deeper life in Christ. Thus, they will share in the kingdom here and now, and in the kingdom to come.

3. **Intercessions:**

Let us turn to the God of all life and blessing, who calls us into deeper life with Him through His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us respond: **The time is now!**

That we may respond to the call of God, and accept God’s grace to bring about what He asks of us, we pray: **The time is now!**

That our world leaders and the leaders of faith communities, local and international, may create a society that more faithfully reflects the kingdom of God, we pray: **The time is now!**

That we may be instruments of change, renewal and transformation in the lives of those we share life with, we pray: **The time is now!**

That the Word of God may be a lamp to lead us in the way of the Lord, to be faithful followers,  
we pray: **The time is now!**

That those struggling with addictions may receive the Lord's healing help to free them to  
respond more faithfully and joyfully to His love, we pray: **The time is now!**

That we may not become complacent, and fall into the idea of making only Advent and Lent  
times of particular growth in our discipleship of Jesus, we pray: **The time is now!**

For Pope Francis' monthly intention, that the Lord may give us the grace to live in full  
fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all,  
we pray: **The time is now!**

### **And how can we help you in prayer this week?**

#### **Let us pray:**

O Risen Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life,  
Make us faithful followers of the spirit of your resurrection.  
Grant that we may be inwardly renewed,  
dying to ourselves so that you may live in us.  
May our lives serve as signs of the transforming power of your love.  
Use us as your instruments for the renewal of society,  
bringing your life and love to all,  
and leading them to your Church.  
This we ask of you, Lord Jesus,  
living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours on us today, we pray that all  
those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we say as  
one, **OUR FATHER ...****

**Celebrating the Word:** A Ministry of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. ([Celebrating the Word](#) was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). For information: Website: [www.resurrectionists.ca](http://www.resurrectionists.ca) E-mail: [provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca](mailto:provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca) The Scripture version used in this commentary is the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).