

January 21, 2024  
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Mark 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John. They, too, were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

### **Background:**

Last week the Gospel text was John's account of the first disciples coming to Jesus. This Sunday the Gospel text is taken from Mark's Gospel and describes the first disciples joining Jesus from a different perspective.

Mark begins his Gospel with John the Baptist in the desert announcing a baptism of repentance, to prepare for the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. He then describes the baptism of Jesus. As Jesus is coming out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. Mark states that the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert but does not describe the temptations. All these events are told with brevity (14 verses), and then Mark takes up the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. The beginning of that ministry is described in the Gospel text for this Sunday.

The text begins with a simple statement that the events here took place after John had been arrested. It is not clear from the text why he chose to mention the arrest of John the Baptist. Scripture scholars believe that initially Jesus may have been a disciple of John, setting out on his own only after John was arrested (John 3:22). However, here Jesus is portrayed as traveling among the towns and villages of Galilee rather than in the desert wilderness. The message of Jesus in verse 15 is very similar to that of John as described in other Gospels. "In those days John the Baptist appeared preaching in the desert of Judea (and) saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1-2)

The "kingdom of God" was loaded with meaning for the people of the day. The earliest traditions would identify the Hebrew people as the kingdom of God. God was understood as the true ruler of the people. The king ruled only as a representative of God. The failure of this system led many to put their hope in some future intervention by God, rather than hoping for a faithful ruler who would reestablish the kingdom of God. Jesus' proclamation states simply that "now is the time" when the hoped-for future kingdom of God has arrived and the time for hoping is over. This message that "the time of fulfillment has arrived" would stir people deeply. It is also the kind of bold statement that would have attracted people's attention. Those who lived with the burden of heavy taxes and an oppressive foreign government would have hope of relief. But the political and religious leaders would have found such comments threatening.

This brief summation of Jesus' message is followed by Mark's account of the call of the first disciples—the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John. The text describes why these successful fishmen are willing to respond completely to Jesus' invitation. They are called not just to be pupils of the teacher, the traditional role of disciples—they are to work with Jesus in gathering other disciples. They are to become "fishers of men." In exchange, they are invited to live with him, but they are not told where. They must be willing to learn by being with Jesus and letting him lead the way. These men of responsibility are being asked to leave their families, the sea, and a way of life that has brought them a certain degree of success. By becoming disciples, they must exchange their familiar daily life for the unfamiliar, and for dependence on Jesus. It was also a significant break with the basic understanding of family responsibility, a basic value of their society. Many would have looked on such a way of life with disdain.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Think about the most radical change that you have had to make in your life. What led to that radical change?
2. What is it that you envision by the term the Kingdom of God? What kind of changes does that imply?
3. What do you think Jesus was feeling as he learned that John the Baptist had been arrested?
4. Picture yourself as one of these early disciples. What are some of the things that go through you as hear Jesus asking you to become one of his disciples?
5. Have you ever felt like God was asking you to change your way of life, and live more as his disciple?
6. Could Jesus be asking you to be his disciple, now, today? What stirs in you as you consider that possibility?
7. Can you talk honestly and openly to Jesus about your desire and/or reluctance to being a “fisher of men?”

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for January 21, 2024, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying:

"Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you."

So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's bidding.

Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it.

Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing,

"Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed," when the people of Nineveh believed God;

they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way,

he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

Teach me your ways, O Lord., make your ways known to me; teach me your paths,

guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.

In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way.

He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way.

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.

From now on, let those having wives act as not having them,

those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning,

those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God:

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

They abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them.

So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

### **Excerpts from Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; and Mark 1:14-20**

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for January 21st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel relates Mark's version of the story of Jesus welcoming his first disciples. It starts with Jesus coming to Galilee proclaiming, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." It concludes with the calling of four fishermen, "Come after me," and they answer the call, abandoning their nets and their families and following Jesus.

The other readings also have references to the time of fulfillment, and to responding to the Lord's call, and repentance and changing of ways. In the first reading from Jonah, the Lord instructs Jonah to declare in Nineveh that the city is to be destroyed. When the people of the city repent of their evil, God does not carry out the destruction. Psalm 25 requests, "Teach me your ways, O Lord," and adds, "The Lord shows sinners the way, and guides the humble to justice." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Time is running out. Let those weeping act as not weeping... The world in its present form is passing away."

As we continue into Ordinary time on the Liturgical calendar, this and the next five Sunday Gospels in a row will be from Mark, taking us into the second week of Lent. Last week John's version of the welcoming of the first disciples had a different perspective than the one for this Sunday. As this Gospel from Mark begins, John the Baptist has been arrested, and Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming, "This is the time of fulfillment." There is a sense of urgency as he calls his first disciples, encouraging the four fishermen to drop what they are doing. "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Joe