

## Homily for 3rd Sunday year B

Today we have the ambivalences of the Call: “Come after me.” (Mk 1:17). It is a common misunderstanding, it seems to me, to expect that the experience of a call from God is somehow laced with peace, charged with happiness, and results in victory. Most instances in the scriptures suggest otherwise. Many prophets, even Moses, were reluctant and hesitant. They often felt not up to the test at all. Sometimes they regretted that the call had ever been placed. Jonah's problem was even more confounding. He was invested with a momentous message for the sprawling city of Nineveh. The entire place was going to be demolished by God in forty days' time. And yet, before Jonah could walk through the city announcing its doom, the whole lot of them, including the king, repented. Moved by their change of heart, their sackcloth and ashes, God relented and did not execute the threat. What's interesting is that Jonah gets very upset. In fact, he's enraged and embarrassed: “I might as well be dead as go on living.” How many setbacks can one experience and yet not question the call in the first place? He should have known better, Jonah admits, even at the moment of the call. The message was clear and he gave it, but his worst suspicions concerning God's tenderness were confirmed. His predictions would not come true. The only bright spot: Nineveh was saved. God asks: “Am I not to feel sorry for Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, to say nothing of all the animals?” (Jon 4:11).

*A person was having a tough time finding a job what with the current economic problems. He couldn't even get an interview. Finally, he secured an interview and needless to say, he was trying his best to impress. The interviewer said, In this job Mr Sam, we need someone who is responsible. I'm the one you want, Sam replied. At my last job every time anything went wrong, they said I was responsible. Jonah was like this. Thank God that the heart of God is not like the egos of those he calls.*

As much can be said of the apostles whom Jesus called to himself. By all rational accounts, they were a chancy lot. And their subsequent doubts would seem to number as many as their confirmations. You would think that, after being invited by one such as Christ, all would be smooth sailing. Things would be free and clear. They would have one confirmation after another. And yet, we know their call must surely have been experienced as a journey into frustration and failure. How many setbacks can one experience and yet not question the call in the first place? How many hopes, once clung to, have to be given up, before you give up? Perhaps the words of St. Paul are responsive to these questions, when he advises radical detachment from every cherished good. Business, family, feelings, all indeed lovely—all messages from God's bounty—but none of them is God's very self. No one of these lavish gifts is the giver.

*Mrs. Jones, is a kindergarten teacher at an elementary and she is always amazed by the things her students say. Just last week she asked class, "What is the shape of the earth? Does anyone know?" Little Rebecca spoke up and said, "According to my Daddy -- terrible!"*

We are all, in effect, pilgrims, prophets, apostles, and sojourners in this passing bright circus of the world. We all have our message to give and our own act to perform. Such is the nature of our call into existence. But like Jonah, we are well advised not to let immediate expectations or even our

long-range dreams delude us. In the end, the final word is Good News from this strangely wonderful God who wants to capture us all in a net of eternal love.