

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, JAN. 22, 2006
(Year B, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time)
(Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Ps 25; 1 Cor 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20)

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This Sunday's readings urge us to take stock of the shortness of the time that we have for conversion, for truly "turning" to the Lord and casting off once and for all all procrastination and every obstacle which impedes our progress in our journey to full life. The first reading recounts Jonah's mission to Nineveh. Actually, this reflects Jonah's second chance, too, for when first called, he fled the other way! Nineveh was the capital of Israel's great enemy, Assyria. Jonah could not handle being sent to attempt this terrible city's conversion. But he finally went, and all Nineveh converted, doing penance and wearing sackcloth (even the animals!).

The psalm is a humble prayer for guidance and knowledge of God's will. The psalmist reminds God (and himself) of God's great mercy and compassion. Paul, in the second reading, urges detachment from the things of this world. Nothing should stand in the way, or hinder in any way, our following Jesus in the way of the Kingdom; see Mark 4:1-20; 9:43-50; Luke 9:57-62; 14:15-33.

The gospel reading contains in a nutshell Jesus' proclamation: the time of waiting for eschatological salvation was complete (cf. Gal 4:4); the Kingdom of God has finally drawn near; one must repent, turn to the Lord with one's whole heart and soul; and believe the Good News (trust God and his Son Jesus). "Good News" refers to the end of exile, to the end of the wait for salvation, for God to finally act. The term comes from the prophet of the late Babylonian Exile and after, Isa 40:9; 61:1. This is what the pious in Israel had hoped for (Matt 13:10-17), as did Jesus' disciples, who heard his eschatological proclamation and immediately left everything and followed him. The prior period of waiting was over, signified by the Baptist's arrest (see Matt 11:2-15).