

HEARING, REPENTING AND FOLLOWING

On 22nd October 1978, the whole world stood still as they awaited the inauguration of a new Pope – Karol Cardinal Josef Wojtyla. He had been elected few days before and became the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years. During his Inaugural Homily, Pope John Paul II who was aware of the fear in peoples' hearts and minds on how his Papacy could shape the Church and the world; delivered a homily that has stood the taste of times. He said: "Brothers and sisters, **do not be afraid** to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. **Do not be afraid**. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. **Do not be afraid**. Christ knows "what is in man". He alone knows it." Three times during that homily, Pope John Paul II called on everyone not to be afraid, but to open-up to Christ and His transforming power. Upon hearing him, so many turned back to the Catholic Church and became followers of Christ to the point that John Paul II's Papacy brought down several systems in the world including Communism.

On 5th November 2008, the eyes of the world turned to the Presidential Race in United States of America. When it was announced that Barack Obama had won the election making him the 44th and the first African American President of the greatest country in the world, so many people were filled with jitters on what his presidency could mean for USA and the globe. At 7:51 GMT, Barack Obama delivered his Victory Speech and said: "This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubts and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: **Yes, we can.**" After that speech, Barack Obama touched a lot of hearts as so many of his hearers believed in the American dream once again, turned towards his agenda and followed his presidency which brought enormous good to USA and to the world.

Today, we are presented with Christ' Inaugural Homily/Speech according to today's Gospel of Mark Chapter 1. In that Gospel pericope, Christ' homily/speech was simple, clear, and straightforward – "**The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.**" This simple message of Christ had no ulterior motive attached to it; He wanted people to repent, be reconciled with God and to be saved. So many Jewish people heard this inaugural homily/speech of Christ and were captivated by it such as Simon and Andrew, James and John; when He reached out to them, they left everything, turned their backs to their profession and followed Him immediately. It is this same perennial Good News of God that we heard in today's First Reading from Prophet Jonah Chapter 3. The people of Nineveh had turned against God, but God continued searching for them. He sent Jonah to call them to repentance by giving them 40 days to repent, that is, to do a *Metanoia* – which is a

total change of mind and direction; they heard the Good News, repented, and followed God.

My friends, the crucial questions we need to ask ourselves today are:

- What are we hearing?
- How are we repenting?
- Whom are we following?

It is imperative to state that in our world where there is so much noise, it is crucial that we are listening to the right message that will lead us back to God and not to motivational speakers who are looking at keeping their fanbase happy and remaining relevant. Due to the many motivational speakers in our present day that only add to the confusion of people, it is important to note that there is one YARDSTICK to measuring true messengers of Christ – *Are they preaching the Good News of God or are they preaching an ulterior message and promoting themselves as modern day Saviours?*

At every Diaconate Ordination, the ordaining Bishop presents the *instrumentum laboris* (A Book of the Gospels) to the ordained deacon with these words: “**Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you now are, Believe what you read, Teach what you Believe, and Practice what you teach.**” In Believing what we read, it is important that the Pope, Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful, are reading the Good News of God and not their own interpretations of it. In Teaching what we believe, it is important that whatever the Pope, Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful teach, are geared to everyone’s daily repentance including the daily repentance of the preacher. No Good News should be that of an ulterior or subtle message condemning other people and their way of life. In Practising what we teach, it is important that the Pope, Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful, continue to point everyone to God and not to themselves. Any person who is always pointing accusing fingers on others without acknowledging his/her own weaknesses and sinfulness is certainly not preaching the Good News of God. The Good News is Christ; every preacher of the Good News must point his/her hearers to Christ who is both *the terminus a quo et terminus ad quem*. As St Paul reminds us in today’s Second Reading, the world as we know it is passing away.

My friends, let us remember that no Pope, Bishop, Clergy or Lay Faithful can give us salvation; salvation can only be found in God. Let us hear Him, repent of our sins, and follow Him. Like Pope John Paul II and Barack Obama, who used their inaugural messages to point their direction of travel; let us take to heart the direction of travel which Christ has revealed to us with His inaugural message of today and follow Him wherever He may go, always be near Him and ensure that nothing keeps us away from Him, since He is our destiny. **Let us Hear, Repent and Follow Him!!!**

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Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (21/01/2024)