



PARISH OF ST. AGATHA 23RD/24TH JANUARY 2021



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POPE FRANCIS: GOD CALLS US TO CONVERSION AT EVERY STAGE

Pope Francis reminds Christians that every moment is the right time to convert our hearts toward love of God and neighbour. In his catechesis homily on Sunday, Pope Francis took his cue from the day's Gospel (Mk 1:14-20), in which Jesus begins his public ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist. Jesus' preaching, said the Pope, can be summed up in these words: "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." He said two key themes emerge from this message: "time and conversion".

TIME OF SALVATION

Pope Francis noted that Mark's Gospel refers to time as "the duration of the history of salvation worked by God. The time 'fulfilled' is that in which this salvific action reaches its pinnacle, it's full realisation," he said. "It is the historical moment in which God sent His Son into the world and His Kingdom is rendered more 'close' than ever."

SALVATION AND CONVERSION

Yet, he added, salvation is not an automatic process. "Salvation is a gift of love," he said. "And as such is freely given and calls for a freely given response: it calls for conversion." The Pope said conversion implies a change of mentality, in which we refuse to follow the way of the world. "Sin brought into the world a mentality that tends toward the affirmation of oneself against others and against God," he said, "and for this purpose it does not hesitate to use deceit and violence."

THE TIME IS NOW

On the other hand, Jesus' message of conversion invites us to recognise our dependence on God and His grace. It also involves cultivating a balanced attitude toward material goods, becoming welcoming and humble in our relationships, and finding fullness in serving others. Pope Francis warned that the time we have to welcome our salvation is limited to the duration of our earthly lives, which is brief indeed. "It is a gift of God's infinite love, but is also the time to prove our love for Him," said the Pope. "For this reason every moment, every instant of our existence is precious time to love God and neighbour, and thereby enter into eternal life."

TIMES AND SEASONS OF LIFE

The Pope also noted that our lives follow two rhythms: "one, measurable, made of hours, days, years; the other, composed of the seasons of our development: birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, old age, death." Faith, said Pope Francis, helps us to discover the true spiritual meaning of each of these moments of life. He added that God reaches out to us with a specific call at each phase of our life, to which we are free to respond 'yes' or 'no'.

And the Pope urged everyone to pay attention so that we do not let Jesus pass by without responding to His call. In conclusion, Pope Francis invited us to allow the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us recognise God's call in every season of life. "And may she help us to convert to from the mentality of the world," he prayed, "to that of love and service." (Vatican news by Devin Watkins).

WHAT NET ENTANGLES OUR FREEDOM TO FOLLOW CHRIST?

Today's Gospel (Mark 1:14-20) is a vocational story, but not just for men and women discerning priestly or consecrated life. The call to follow Jesus is for everybody, regardless what one's livelihood is. We are to see ourselves in Simon and Andrew, in James and John, in that our *time has come* and Jesus is calling us today, to prioritise the important things that matter in our lives. When Jesus passes by and presents Himself to us, we have to respond. Faith is our response to God's call to follow Him.

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

To follow Jesus where? Into Heaven of course and we do that by repenting for our sins. Repenting is not just being sorry for our sins. It involves making a radical conversion, a change of direction and priorities in my life. To renounce my evil behaviour which offends God. To follow and imitate Jesus by His example of how to love and forgive, even under the most difficult circumstances. To never stop praying for an increase of our faith and the conversion of others.

GOD'S ANGER APPEASED

In the First Reading today (Jonah 3:1-5 10), we see how the people angered God by their hardened hearts and their indifference towards Him. God was going to destroy the city and its rebellious people. But first He sent the Prophet Jonah to give them the opportunity to repent for their sinful way of life. Jonah preached and the people actually listened. Seeing their wayward lives as offensive to God, who created them, they renounced their evil lifestyles by repenting and doing penance. In the same way as we go to Confession. God listened as a tender and merciful Father and forgave them. He withdrew and removed the outstanding punishment due to the people in the city of Ninevah. Pray and Faith can move mountains and combined together can move this virus off the earth.

GOD'S ANGER RETURNS

The majority of the people in Ireland and the world have become indifferent and cold towards their Creator. Many schools, shops, business offices, sports stadiums removed God from their activities and they are now closed. Much of the reverence and worship was missing in Masses. One should only receive Holy Communion if one has repented for their sins in Confession. Few did that and no wonder all is closed down. God is angry with the world and its unfaithful people.

THE MINDSET OF CHRIST

The Good News is that God will still give us a chance to reconcile with Him. The world is sick but Jesus can heal it if we ask Him. Governments have the wrong mindsets. We must turn back to God by putting on the mindset of Christ. The time to repent is now, in our hearts. Begin a structured prayer life during the day. Pray the Rosary, the Angelus, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy periodically throughout the day. The disciples left their nets putting Jesus first in their lives. They left their family meaning, we are to put Jesus before family. We would have no family if God did not create us. One must ask - what is the net in my life limiting my freedom to follow Jesus? What personal relationships are blocking my way? What anxieties and worries blind me? What am I addictive to in the inter-net and television that occupies all my day? What is keeping me from keeping Jesus company through pray? What self-centred ambitions have me entangled in the net of distraction? Sin blinds us make us deaf to the Voice of God in Jesus. To follow Jesus is a complete act of trust and a total surrender of ourselves to Him and His Ways. Do do His Will. Are we willing to entrust our lives to Jesus?

OUR TIME IS LIMITED

To follow Jesus means to do what He does, to call other people to the Kingdom. To love one another. St. Paul tells us today (1 Cor 7:29-31), that the world is passing and not to become completely engrossed in it. Personal attachments that may appear permanent can disappear at a moment's notice. Whether life is good or bad. The call of Jesus is to attach ourselves to an everlasting permanent relationship (an Eternal Covenant) with Jesus, beginning now and continuing in Heaven. God bless, Fr Brendan.