

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – 01-24-2021

A friend of mine from outside of the area who attends our parish quite regularly relayed a personal story to me the other day about his ongoing discernment.

For a while now he has been discerning an order of Franciscan's based out of North Dakota.

Anyway, he was praying the other day and he was reflecting on what Pope Saint John Paul II said early in his pontificate. He challenged everyone to put out into the deep and lower their nets.

The Pope's actual quote was, "Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

My friend said that as he was meditating on this challenge in his own life he started to think about what the deep meant to him and what it is that he's afraid of.

As he was thinking about this he said suddenly the word Warsaw came to mind. He thought it a little strange but the friars that he is discerning are in Warsaw, North Dakota so he didn't think too much about it at first.

But the word wouldn't go away. So he said somehow, and only under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he happened to look up the meaning of the word.

The word means grouper – a very large fish. As a matter of fact, the biggest one ever caught on record was 400 pounds.

Is this a sign? Does it mean that he is called to be a fisher of men? It's a big scary decision so He doesn't know yet but he probably has uncovered some of his fear.

In the first reading today we heard that the Lord was sending Jonah to announce to the people of Nineveh that, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed."

You may also recall that Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he feared that the people would actually repent.

As the story goes, Jonah got on a ship heading in the opposite direction. He was thrown overboard into the depths of the sea because his shipmates learned that he had disobeyed his God and was bringing disaster upon them all. He was swallowed up by a whale and finally spit out on the shores of Nineveh.

Ultimately, he did make the three day journey through Nineveh and the people did repent and were spared destruction – not exactly what Jonah had in mind.

Following the Lord can be scary because it always requires incredible trust in the unknown and Jesus will most likely lead us out into the deep – to a place that at the time we really don't think we want to go.

In the gospel today, Jesus proclaimed that, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

And then he called some of his first disciples. These were fishermen so he spoke to them in words they would immediately understand. "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

The Lord is calling all of us to go out into the deep. Like my friend we need to meditate on what this means to us and what we might be afraid of.

Undoubtedly, we are living in challenging times but nothing is outside of our Lord's providential control. He has allowed us to come to this strange place in history because he knows we can handle it.

So Saint John Paul's challenge rings as true today as it did when he first said it over 40 years ago.

"Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."