

Imagine a special circumstance

Let's say the US was overrun by Canada

They destroy all rights of Americans

They are ruthless masters

They make Toronto the capital of the land

We are powerless

Then, Mexico invades and defeats them

They are a bit easier on us

But still keep us from acting freely

Toronto is no longer the capital

But it still holds a special memory

One that brings back deep resentment

This is our first reading

The Assyrians had captured Israel

Nineveh was their capital city

They were then overrun by the Babylonians

Things got a bit easier for Israel

But Nineveh still held a special contempt for them

Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh

Their enemy's capital

And he is to call them to conversion

He is reluctant

He tries to run away, refusing God's invitation

But eventually goes

He brings God's promise of destruction to his enemies

In 40 days you will be destroyed

Payback for years of persecution

He is ready to see them blotted from the earth

But the Ninevites do something unexpected

They believe him

They repent in sack cloths and ashes

God backs away from his punishment

He pardons them

And Jonah is crushed

He gets mad at God for not keeping his word to Jonah

For not destroying the Ninevites

He doesn't understand God's mercy

An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth

These are man's ways, not God's

God is ushering in a new way

And with Christ's entering the world

He turns the way of the world on its head

The old order is gone, the new order has come

The time of fulfillment

Not a specific year or chronological time

But a special time, a qualitative time, a new era

And it can be boiled down to one event

Jesus' resurrection

That is the one thing that changed Paul

It is the one thing that can change us

If we truly believe it

We are blessed to live in this time

The apostles were there at the beginning

When they were called

They had no idea what was to come about

They would experience the resurrection as it happened

We know the rest of the story

But it seems we often lose the sense of urgency the disciples had

Jesus approaching Peter and Andrew

Immediately they leave their boat and follow

James and John, mending nets

Getting ready for tomorrow's work

At his invitation, they leave it all behind

Becoming fishers of men

Like he did with his disciples

Jesus comes to us in the ordinariness of our lives

The apostles aren't in the Synagogue or on a retreat

They are at work

Sewing and cleaning the nets

Getting ready for the next day

The same thing they did the day before

The same they expected to do far into the future

Into this everyday life, Jesus enters

A simple invitation

Come after me

But if we accept it, as the apostles did

It changes everything

It changes how we see marriage and family

It changes how we see work and civil responsibilities

It changes our entire outlook

Because it is an invitation into *mentenoia*

Conversion of heart and soul

It is not simply about living a moral life

Christianity is not only an ethical system or ethical imperative

It is not something reduced to reason

If that is what our Christian faith is, there is nothing to believe

It becomes all rational

If we can grasp it in our mind we can control it

It loses its fascination

And it loses the mystery

This is the time of fulfillment

This invitation of Christ is an invitation to a new outlook

It is an invitation into a world where death has been overcome

Where it is no longer a threat

What if everything we consider absolute and final is not?

Can I let go of these things?

As GK Chesterton said

As soon as I can see the world cannot make me perfectly happy

It can begin to make me happy

The Kingdom of God has begun

Not a political realm or moral code

God's new order is the resurrection

A revolution of mind and heart

A revolution that calls us to listen to Christ's invitation to me

To realize it is a personal invitation

Christ speaking to me, to every heart

Calling to me; inviting me to walk this path

And when I hear his invitation

Can I leave my nets behind and follow?

We all have so much in our lives that bind us, keeping us slaves

We all have jealousies, prejudices, conflicts, tensions in the heart

We cannot escape them by running off to Hawaii

Like trying to escape the cold and snow

The Europeans came to America seeking a new world

But they brought the old world with them

The old is in our hearts

So Christ invites us into a *mentenoia*

A conversion that is so deep it impacts every aspect of our life

It is to see marriage and family in a new light

It is to see our work in a new light

Are we ready to leave the baggage behind?

The gossiping, the hatred, the deception, the greed, the anger

Whatever it is that is keeping us from God

Like the Ninevites

They repented and believed in Jonah's message

They never left Nineveh, and Nineveh was never the same

Lastly we are called to follow Jesus

This doesn't mean we have to move to Jerusalem and learn Aramaic

We don't have to grow a beard, wear sandals and a tunic

It means living a Christian life

Beginning in our families

With our spouse, our children and our parents

In our parish, our school and our places of work

It means taking a stand

Even when it is not politically correct

Striving for the protection of all human life

From conception to natural death

Standing up for the provisions of the just war theory

Taking care of the poor and marginalized

These are often put at odds with each other

But it is not an either/ or battle

But a both/ and approach that can unite

We stand up for marriage between one man and one woman

Calling ourselves and others to holiness and conversion

In whatever walk of life they are in right now

It means we are not defined by our consumption or material wealth

But by our relationship with God

A spiritual life that is lived in human interaction

Lent will be here before we know it

The invitation is here today

Repent, and believe in the Gospel

And come after me