

HOMILY ~ THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

JANUARY 20/21, 2024

There was a Biology 101 professor who was welcoming his freshman college students the first day of class. He did the first day of class drill, roll call, introductions, reviewing the syllabus and then he went on. This is what he said: *“During the semester, when we meet for lecture or lab work, there will be times when I will stumble. I will slur words. I will have to stop now and then because of a tremor in my hand or leg. You may have trouble deciphering my handwriting at times. Don’t be afraid to ask me to decipher. You will not offend me. I have been living with Parkinson’s disease for the past five years, it has not stopped me from teaching and it will not stop you from learning. I can still teach the subject that I love.”* I think this is a man who has found his calling, and he is committed to doing what he needs to do in order to follow that calling.

In the First Reading, we encounter Jonah. He received his calling from God, and it is very clear. God wanted him to warn the people of Nineveh that they would be destroyed if they did not repent. Let me define calling. It is something beyond ourselves, beyond our own happiness and beyond our own prosperity. It is something that God is calling you to do to serve others, and he has given you the charisms to do it. It is your calling to serve others that gives your life meaning and purpose. Jonah was called to warn the people of Nineveh, so that is how he was called to serve others. These are the bigger things in our lives that usually unfold over years. You may have more than one.

Your calling is different from the things that you need to do to fulfill your calling. One of the things that you may need to do to fulfill your calling is to get an education or some type of training. If you are a student right now, your calling is not to be a student. Your calling is what you are preparing to do when you graduate. If you are a student now and you do not really like being a student, you need to remember that this is not your calling. You need to hang in there with the frustration and the discouragement so you can eventually fulfill your calling. Maybe your calling is to provide for your family. Your job may be what you need to do to provide for your family. If that is true, your calling is not making money, your calling is to provide for your family. When work demands interfere with family responsibilities, you may need to put your family first because that is your calling. Our biology teacher in the story I told earlier would have gotten an education to prepare to be a biology teacher. He also probably had to modify some of his teaching methods to make sure his Parkinson’s disease did not interfere with the effectiveness of his teaching.

There also may be things that we need to leave behind in order to fulfill our calling. Jonah hated the people of Nineveh because they were enemies of the Jewish people, and he wanted to see them punished. He could not forgive them. He had to leave that behind to fulfill his calling. He gave a half-hearted warning, and the people repented. Can you imagine what he could have done if he really put himself into it? What did our biology teacher have to leave behind? He had to get over the embarrassment that he must have experienced every time he got up in front of a new classroom full of students. The embarrassment he felt when he stumbled and slurred his speech. Students probably made fun of him at times. I am sure that went away when the students got to know him, but he may have been tempted to just give up teaching. If you are fulfilling your calling, you will still have days when you are frustrated or discouraged. You need to leave that behind and stay committed. You may need to leave time wasters behind. I think social media is a big one ... binge watching television, shopping and spending money on things you do not need. We all need down time, but we need to leave it behind when it is interfering with our calling.

While your calling is something that usually unfolds over years, you have to recognize when you may need to find a new calling. If your calling was to take care of a sick friend or relative and then they pass, you may need to find a new calling. Empty nesters may need to find a new calling. When you retire, you may need to find a new calling. With our biology professor, his Parkinson's disease may progress to the point that he is no longer an effective teacher. Then he will have to find his new calling.

I think it is important to name your calling, because this is where you find purpose and meaning in your life. It is what gets you out of bed in the morning. Naming your calling prevents you from becoming side tracked by things that just are not important.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim