

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B ,1.27.21

Jonah 3:1-5/1 Corinthians 7:29-31/Mark 1:14-20

GOT A SECOND? JESUS NEEDS YOU

The editorial page of the SF Chronicle yesterday had an insightful cartoon. It sketches President Biden sitting at his desk. In the 'word balloon' above him he's thinking: *Pandemics are as **old** as humanity...Racism has plagued us for **centuries**... Immigration reform is **decades** overdue... Infrastructure has decayed for **years**... Terrorists are plotting **month** by month... What if markets have a bad **week**?... Poverty is a grind every **day**... The climate crisis is in its eleventh **hour**... Civil war could break out any **minute**.* His dark thoughts are interrupted by a voice calling him: *Hey, Joe. Got a **second**?*



He's jarred out of his anxiety and pulled into the present moment. In the midst of the litany of challenges and woes he's facing, someone has the audacity to interrupt him: *Hey, Joe. Got a second?* The message of Jesus is just as jarring. He interrupts the people of Galilee and the people of every time and place with one urgent message: *This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel!* Mark's entire Gospel is a tale of urgency. Some form of the word "immediate" is used 42 times in Mark's Gospel. There's no room for distractions here, or anything that would

take us away from the present moment -- the moment where we are right now. This is the time of fulfillment.



The gospel offers us a snapshot of the call of the first disciples, busy about their work, tending their father's business, covered with seaweed and mud, the smell of fish permeating the air and as well as their loincloths and their hands. Along comes the interruption of Jesus: *Hey, Simon, got a second? Hey, Andrew, d'you mind coming with me?* And they were swept up into the flow of God's love, abandoned their nets and followed. That's how Jesus meets us and calls to us – not in some imagined state of euphoria or while we're in the depths of prayer. He approaches us in the midst of our busy and complicated lives, in the present moment.

He comes to us while our minds are preoccupied with problems or our bodies wracked with aches and pains. He seeks us out in the boring, routine, ordinariness of life during Covid. He calls when you are anxious because someone you love is hospitalized with Coronavirus. Jesus calls the person struggling with her marriage, trying to find her way to forgiveness and healing. Jesus comes to the student struggling to keep focus after several hours of zoom classes. He's there with the Democrat who's ecstatic over the new administration, and he calls to the

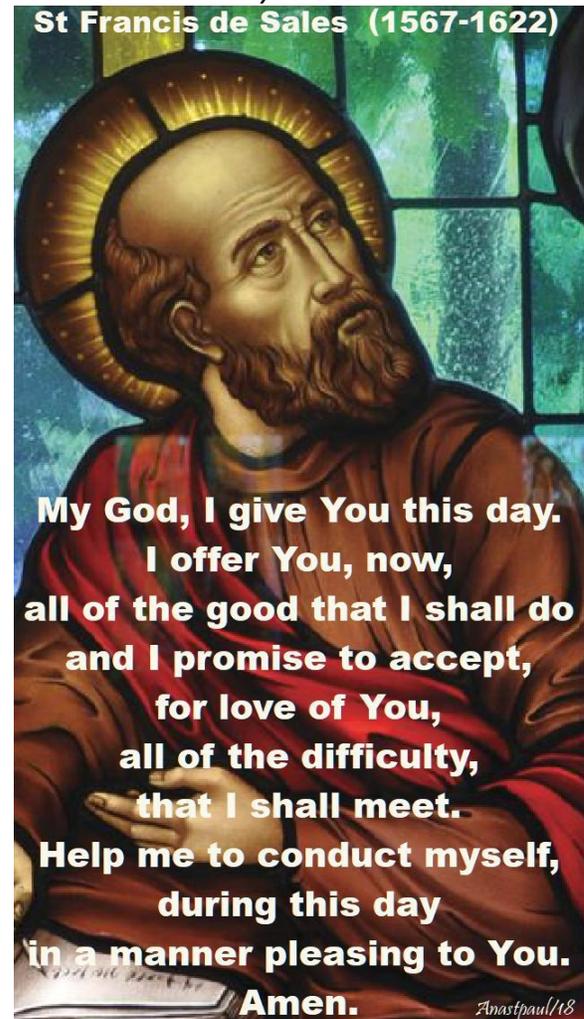
Republican who saw the election of Joe Biden as a “dark” day for America. No matter our age or our occupation, our physical condition or our state of mind, the call is the same: *The Kingdom is at hand... Repent.... Believe... and Come after me!*



Each one of us bears a responsibility to answer that call and it will be a different story for every one of us in our own particular life as we give ourselves over to the flow of God’s will. The “Decree on the Laity” (III.13) issued at the Second Vatican Council over fifty years ago addresses your role as baptized members of the Church so profoundly when it states: *They need a full awareness of their role in building up society, an awareness that will keep them preoccupied with bringing Christian large-heartedness to the fulfillment of their duties, whether family, social or professional... Their behavior will have a penetrating impact on the whole circle of their life and labors.... True apostles look for the opportunity to announce Christ to their neighbors through the spoken word as well. For there are many persons who can hear the gospel and recognize Christ only through the laity who live near them.*

Today, January 24th, is the Feast Day of St. Francis De Sales (1567-1622). Many of you know that my religious congregation -- the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales (OSFS) -- follow his spirituality. Often called the “gentleman saint,” I think you would have liked to meet him. He was a bishop and a scholar, a great writer and spiritual guide. A

brilliant nobleman, yet he was completely down to earth in his understanding and appreciation of the human condition, the emotional life, the complexity of relationships, the frustrations of daily living. He said: *Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself.* He gave practical advice to ordinary people in trying to help them live out their Christian vocation. He said: *The opportunity to do extraordinary things doesn’t present itself very often; however, the opportunity to do ordinary things extraordinarily well is always before us.* He accepted people as they were and told them: *Be who you are and be that well.*



I'd like to refer you to a prayer that St. Francis de Sales recommended. This spiritual practice is a way of putting a simple but effective structure to our daily living, and keeping our faith and our God before our eyes. It's a prayer called the "Direction of Intention." I've shared it with you in the past and the children in St. Perpetua School begin each day reciting it. St. Francis recommended that a person start off the day with these words: *My God, I give you this day. I offer you now all of the good that I shall do, and I promise to accept, for love of you, all of the difficulty that I shall meet. Help me to conduct myself during this day in a manner pleasing to you.* By beginning the day in prayer, offering yourself, your words and works to God, the events of the day take on a new meaning. They become part of the adventure of following Jesus no less than those first disciples. Even when troubles and difficulties, problems and frustrations beset you, St. Francis de Sales recommended to keep yourself in peace by being united with God's love and living in the present moment. In that way you are fulfilling what we pray when we say: *Thy kingdom come...Thy will be done.*



St. Francis de Sales offered this prayer to help, especially in times of difficulty and anxiety:

Be at Peace

*Don't look forward in fear
to the changes of life;
rather look to them with full hope
as they arise.*

*God, whose very own you are,
will deliver you from out of them.*

*He has kept you hitherto,
and He will lead you safely
through all things;*

*and when you cannot stand it,
God will bear you in his loving arms.*

*Do not fear what may happen tomorrow;
the same everlasting Father*

who cares for you today

will take care of you then and every day.

*He will either shield you from suffering,
or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.*

Be at peace,

*and put aside all anxious thoughts
and imagination.*

May the example and inspiration
of St. Francis de Sales help us all
to follow Jesus whole-heartedly and
to live each day in the present moment.



John Kasper, OSFS