

Dear Friends,

In 2006 Qusay Hussein, an Iraqi man from Mosul was playing a game of volleyball, cheered on by his family and friends, when a suicide bomb exploded near him, taking away his sight, half his face and nearly his life. Given a second chance at life and speaking of his experience many years later, Qusay said: "I live in Austin (Texas) now. I've been here almost seven years, and soon I'll have completed my degree at the University of Texas. I'm a refugee, a product of war, but in many ways I feel lucky. Not only am I still here, but I've started a new life doing things I could never have imagined. I'm hopeful about the future. If what I've been thru has taught me anything, it is that you should take every opportunity that comes." Today's readings speak of taking opportunities, of being given a second chance and of the invitation to live our Christian faith in new and life-changing ways.

By the time Jonah has the word of God addressed to him "a second time", he has already been seen as the cause of a storm at sea, thrown overboard and swallowed by a big fish – all in his efforts to escape from the God of Israel. Seeing what befell him because of his lack of obedience to God's will, Jonah takes this "second chance". In doing so, he brings salvation to the people of Nineveh. His message is urgent: there are, Jonah tells the people of Nineveh, only forty days left before their city will be destroyed.

St. Paul, in the second reading, reminds the Corinthians "time is growing short". Paul's language is dramatic when he suggests that those who have wives should live as though they had none. This was because Paul thought that Christ's second coming was something imminent and he wanted the Christians to follow a more Gospel way of life at the coming of Christ. The call to Simon, Andrew, James and John and their response is no less striking. They are going about their ordinary work, casting their nets into the lake, or in the case of James and John mending their nets in preparation for fishing. Jesus calls his new disciples to believe in the Good News. He is calling them and us to believe in him and all that his kingdom stands for.

Like Jonah and Paul, the disciples leave all to follow Jesus. Jesus then gives them their new responsibility, to become fishers of men. They are to proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom of love, justice and peace to those they meet on their journey of life, calling others to follow Jesus just as they have. From mending nets, they will follow Christ mending broken hearts and bodies and restoring others to the fullness of life. They are given new opportunities to teach, to heal, to hear God's word, firstly in their own hearts and then in the hearts and on the lips of those they serve. Answering Jesus' call literally turned their lives upside down.

As was true in the life of the disciples, Jesus comes to each one of us in our ordinary lives. If, as St. Paul says in today's reading, we are "engrossed in the world," we can be blinded to Christ's presence in the day-to-day events of our lives. We will miss the opportunity to follow Jesus, to be bearers of the Good News to those around us and to live our Christian lives fruitfully and faithfully. Our God is a God of "second chances" and of endless opportunity. Like ourselves, neither Paul nor the disciples were perfect, but they were all offered the opportunity to follow Jesus and some were even given a second chance to understand his mission and message. This can reassure us that, should we fail, God is waiting to offer us another opportunity, to offer us forgiveness and healing and to return to his loving embrace.

Your friend in Jesus
Msgr. Zach