

OCTOBER 8, 2019 Tuesday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Jon 3:1-10

Ps 130:1b-2,3-4ab,7-8

Lk 10:38-42

“Set out for the great city of Nineveh and announce to it the message that I will tell you” (Jon 3:2). After some digressions, Jonah finds himself having to face the insistent call of God. The Lord has not forgotten him and renews his missionary call: this time Jonah cannot escape it. How often we are like Jonah, ready to find excuses to avoid our missionary duty. The world in which we live and to which we are sent on a mission is so often pagan that Nineveh is found at every door, every city, every crossroad we encounter. Jonah stood up and, according to the word of the Lord, left for Nineveh, an extraordinarily large city: it took three days to cross it. The world to be evangelized also seems enormous to us and we are faced with seemingly impenetrable unbelief. The modern lifestyle, the consumerist society, the mad rush to money and a fictitious happiness are a great Nineveh.

“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed” (Jon 3:3). We understand the reticence of the prophet, since he is talking to those “bad pagans” whom he would like to see punished by God. But God is God, full of mercy for his children and, although the prophet did not trust in the possibility of their conversion, the Ninevites radically turned to God. “The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth” (Jon 3:5). The preaching of the prophets over many centuries had not been enough to convert the people of Israel, but here the preaching of a single day is enough to change the hearts of the despised Ninevites. This is the wonder of God: he always surprises us in our pastoral expectations. Jesus himself refers to it in the Gospel: “At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here” (Mt 12:41). And God showed them mercy; in simple words, this means that God does not desire the death of the sinner, but conversion (see Ez 33:11). Even when God seems to threaten a punishment, it is love and only love that prevails and that saves in faith. The world needs to hear this proclaimed again today.

Jonah is sent to enter the city of Nineveh, to encounter the Ninevites with his prophetic presence and his preaching of conversion. Jesus is sent by the Father to enter the heart of the city, the home of Martha and Mary. The joy of the unexpected conversion of the Ninevites arouses resistance in the heart of Jonah. The joy of service and listening in the presence of the Master make Martha and Mary true sisters in Jesus' missionary discipleship.

Crossing the threshold of a house means entering the heart of relationships and discovering, together with joy and affection, the wounds and the fragility of living as a family. We are made of flesh, and this reveals to us every profound relationship interwoven with those whose needs we seek to address; Jesus, both human and Lord of our history, has the traits of one who can be extremely close to our hearts. Close enough to enter our home. Jesus – on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to the Mystery of his death and resurrection – by entering Martha and Mary's home crosses the threshold of their hearts.

That house in Bethany, a home of friendship and love, reveals to us the humanity of Christ, refusing to remain a stranger to human suffering and difficulties: he cries, listens, consoles, preaches, wipes tears, and offers himself as food and drink (eucharist). This is what "entering a home" means. Jesus enters the house of Bethany intimately. He does so as a friend, bringing into play his heart and his relationships with the living and the dead (see Jn 11). In the mission entrusted to him by his Father, Jesus lets himself be totally involved. Jesus calls us to overturn the way we think and act: through the key figure of the woman who is all wrapped up and agitated with service, new rules are proposed about the hospitality to be reserved for Christ by missionary disciples, about the salvation that we live and communicate.

The vocations of Martha and Mary are two different and complementary ones, driven by the same intention: to recognize the uniqueness of the One who knocked on the door (see Rev 3:20). These two women, then, do not represent an antithesis, as has too often been suggested. Serving and listening are shown to be reciprocal rather than opposing actions in the mission that Jesus entrusts to the Church for the salvation of the world. The presence of Jesus calls us to take up the journey to enter the heart of every person by listening to the Word and by fraternal service, by proclaiming Easter resurrection and by the Eucharistic banquet of reconciliation that creates communion and unity. All this

happens in the house of Bethany, where the death of Jesus' friend Lazarus is an opportunity for us to purify and to strengthen our own listening, our own service, our own faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Friend and Lord.