

I'm a bit of a fan of the Veggie Tale's movie "Jonah" ... and actually, it's quite an clever and fun movie.

In today's Gospel, Jesus proclaims:

*This generation is an evil generation;  
it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it,  
except the sign of Jonah.*

*Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites,  
so will the Son of Man be to this generation.*

There is the traditional interpretation of this passage to mean that Our Lord's 3 days in the grave prior to His resurrection are tied to the Jonah's three days in the belly of a whale.

Is that all that there is to the "sign of Jonah" ... nothing more than a simple numeric connection between the two events?

In today's first reading, we hear the third chapter of the Book of Jonah.

That's one of the interesting parts of Lent - that we, in a sense, channel surf through the entire Bible.

Here in the third chapter, we've already missed a large part of the story.

In the first chapter, Jonah receives a call to prophesy to Nineveh. God speaks to Jonah, and Jonah's response is ... a resounding "no." In fact, instead of going where God has called him, he decides to take a ship and go in the opposite direction. In the midst of a storm, Jonah is thrown overboard as the "bad luck" that is causing the storm ... and is promptly swallowed by a whale ... or a giant fish ... depending on the translation.

In the second chapter, Jonah is trapped inside a fish. And aside from possibly being slowly digested, he resorts to prayer. God who is merciful, hears Jonah's prayer, and the fish disgorges Jonah onto a beach near Nineveh. You see, while God is merciful and forgiving, His call is irrevocable ... and He gives Jonah a second chance to do His mission.

And now, we are in the third chapter, what we just heard. Jonah begins his mission of preaching, say five words ... at least in Hebrew, it's only 5 words ...

*Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed.*

And he gets about 1/3 of the way through the city when ... BAM ... all of Nineveh from the king and his court, all the way down to the animals ... put on sackcloth, wear ashes, and repent.

I would content that this is the sign of Jonah:

Rebellion ... and the consequences of that rebellion

Repentance ... and a return to our original calling

Fulfillment ... mission accomplished

There is a little-known fact that from Ash Wednesday (last week) through Easter ... there are 47 days. The secret is that the Sundays don't count. Sunday remains a foreshadowing of Easter, and we don't have to continue our penances on that day.

It is also a bit interesting that today ... when we hear Jonah's prophecy of 40 days left until the destruction of the city ... is 40 days left until Easter.

If we were told by a doctor, "you have 40 days to live" ... what would we do differently? I would daresay that none of us are living saints ... and that none of us would consider ourselves in open rebellion with God. But perhaps now that we've survived the first week of Lent 2014, we might examine our direction on things.

Is there any "little rebellion" in our hearts that we might root out? Have we been avoiding dealing with some spiritual difficulty that is causing storms in our life and the lives of those around us?

Are we willing to call out to God and repent of this rebellion ... no matter how small ... no matter how large.

And are we willing to take up our mission ... or rather, take up our cross with renewed vigor and determination and allow God to work more fully in our lives?

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for a spirit of deeper conversion. That we might turn more directly toward God's voice, and hear His call in our life. So that we might better experience His mercy in our lives, and show His mercy to those around us.