

Last week I received an email from an old friend. I hadn't heard from him since probably 1985 when we graduated from college in Flint. And it was addressed "Dear Deacon Jenuwine" ... and passing along the news that a much-despised professor from our undergrad days had retired, he ended by saying that he must be in the midst of a spiritual crisis.

I wasn't sure how to respond, so I was brief, and said that I was hoping to catch up on 24 years and maybe leave theology and spiritual counseling aside until we had caught up.

His second email was appropriately titled: Mulligan.

For those of you who don't know the term, a mulligan is a "do over" or a "gimme." In other words, it's a second chance.

The reading from the book of Jonah starts with chapter three and says, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time."

What is missing in the first two chapters is what we know of the tale of Jonah – he get's a call from God to go to Nineveh, he doesn't want to do it, he heads off to sea, gets in a huge storm, is thrown overboard, eaten by a fish, and then tossed up on shore.

For those of you who might be Veggie Tales fans, or who attended last Saturday's Movie Night – in the animated Veggie Tales movie, right before Jonah is tossed out of the belly of the whale, is a musical number with the catchy line "Our God is a God of second chances."

This is the middle of the first week of Lent. And how are we doing? Did you forget it was Friday and pass on the Filet-O-Fish and without thinking eat a Big Mac? Did you have big plans to pray or read Scripture every day, but ... well ... LIFE just sort of got in the way?

The origin of the English word "REPENT" is "RE" ... or, to do over ... and "PENT" which is a contraction of "PENANCE." That is, even when it comes to our chosen penances – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving ... we can have a do-over, or a gimme, or a mulligan.

So, if you've been thrown off the horse – the horse of Lent ... or the horse of prayer ... or the horse of penance ... I'd say that today's readings encourage you to ... "get back on that horse!"

In the Gospel, Jesus cautions those who are listening NOT to take their second chances for granted. In other words, not to "look a gift horse in the mouth." Rather than take Jesus up on his call to conversion, they were arguing about how he did his miracles or else who his parents were.

And so, we too, shouldn't get caught up on the details of repentance, but we should take God up on his mercy and forgiveness and make an honest effort to repent. And just for the record, here're the lyrics to the song from Veggie Tales which we can take for a reflection.

Praise the Lord! / He's the God of second chances!
You'll be floored / how His love your life enhances!
You can be restored / from your darkest circumstances!
Our God is a God of second chances!