

(B3) SUNDAY 3 OF THE YEAR

(JANUARY 24TH, 2021)

Readings: *Jonah 3: 1 – 5, 10; Psalm 24 (25); 1 Corinthians 7: 29 – 31; Mark 1: 14 – 20.*

We have now heard the first twenty verses of Mark's Gospel – but spread over nine weeks, interrupted by passages from other Gospels. So we may not have noticed an important theme. In Advent we heard the beginning of the Gospel, with its account of the preaching and action of John the Baptist: *He appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and he taught that someone was to come who would baptise you with the Holy Spirit.* On the feast of the Baptism of the Lord this last teaching was repeated immediately before we heard *No sooner had (Jesus) come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him.* We shall not hear the next verses (12 & 13) until the First Sunday of Lent – they tell of our Lord's testing by Satan, and the reading ends with the verses with which today's Gospel begins. In Galilee Jesus *proclaimed the Good News* (the same word as 'Gospel') *from God. "The time has come" he said "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News."*

This verse (15) is the climax to which verses 1 to 14 lead, and it provides the theme for all that follows. The ministry of Jesus, which Mark will provide in the first thirteen chapters of his Gospel is all about these two themes – the nearness of God's rule (his kingdom) and the need for conversion. This – rather than understanding 'repentance' as simply being sorry – is the meaning of the Greek word.

Jesus demonstrates the nearness of the Kingdom by controlling 'unclean spirits', healing the sick, befriending outcasts, stilling a storm, feeding crowds, and raising the dead to life.

And he repeatedly calls on those he meets to change their way of life and their attitudes to others. In the first two readings today we are given examples of what this change, this conversion, will mean. In the Old Testament reading we hear how the preaching of Jonah led the king and people of Nineveh – a pagan city, guilty of great cruelty – to change its way of life. And in the letter to the Corinthians Saint Paul writes: *Our time is growing short*, and teaches that *the world as we know it is passing away*. We live in a new age – the age of God's kingdom and we are all called to change our way of life, to *repent and believe in the Good News*.