

Wednesday 1st of Lent

Gospel text (Lk 11,29-32): As the crowd increased, Jesus began to speak in this way, «People of the present time are evil people. They ask for a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah. As Jonah became a sign for the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up on Judgment Day with the people of these times and accuse them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and here there is greater than Solomon. The people of Nineveh will rise up on Judgment Day with the people of these times and accuse them, for Jonah's preaching made them turn from their sins, and here there is greater than Jonah».

«As Jonah became a sign for the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation»

Fr. Roger J. LANDRY
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Today Jesus describes that the sign he will give to “evil people” is himself as the “sign of Jonah”: «As Jonah became a sign for the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation» (Lk 11:30). Just as Jonah allowed himself tossed overboard the boat to still the raging tempest and save the sailors' lives, so Jesus allowed himself to be tossed overboard to calm the storms of sin that threatens our lives. Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the whale before being spit out on dry land, so Jesus would spend three days in the belly of the earth before walking out of the empty tomb (cf. Mt 12:40).

The sign that Jesus would give to the “evil people” of every generation is the sign of his death and resurrection. His death, freely accepted, is the sign of God's incredible love for us: Jesus gave his life to save our own. His resurrection from the dead is the sign of his divine power. This is the most powerful and moving sign ever given.

But Jesus is the sign of Jonah in yet another sense. Jonah was an icon and agent of conversion. At his preaching, «Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed» (Jon 3:4), the pagan Ninevites converted, as everyone from the king to children to animals covered themselves in sackcloth and ashes. During these forty days of Lent, we have someone “far greater than Jonah” (cf. Lk 11:32) preaching conversion to us—Jesus himself—and our conversion should be just as thorough.

«For Jonah was a servant», St. John Chrysostom writes in the person of Christ, «but I am the Master; and he came forth from the whale, but I rose from death; and he proclaimed destruction, but I come preaching the Good News of the kingdom».

A week ago, on Ash Wednesday, we covered ourselves in ashes and heard individually the words of Jesus' first homily, «Repent and believe in the Gospel» (cf. Mk 1:15). The question for us is: Have we responded yet with deep conversion like the Ninevites and embraced that Gospel?

«Here there is greater than Solomon; here there is greater than Jonah»

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Today's Gospel invites us to focus our hopes in the very Jesus. John Paul II has, in this regard, written that «our salvation would not come from a formula, but from a Person and the certitude this Person instills into us: ‘I am here, in your midst!’».

God—who is Father too— has not gone back on us: «Christianism is a state of grace, it is the surprise of a God that, not satisfied by the creation of the world and of man, has decided to side by his creature» (John Paul II).

We find ourselves beginning Lent: let us not ignore the opportunity the Church is offering us: «Now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation» (2Cor 6:2). After looking at Our Lord Jesus Christ's suffering face during his Passion, shall we still dare asking for additional evidence of His Love? «For He had made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him» (2Cor 5:21). Even more: «He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not, along with him, also freely give us all things? (Rm 8:32). Do we still pretend more signs?

In Christ's bloodstained face «there is greater than Solomon (...); here, there is greater than Jonah» (Lk 11:31-32). This suffering face of the last hour, of the hour of the Cross is «a mystery within the mystery, in front of which human beings should prostrate in worship». Indeed, «to return the face of the Father to men, Jesus had, not only to take on man's face, but to suffer the “face” of sin, too» (John Paul II). Do we want more signs?

«Behold, the man!» (Jn 19:5): herein lies the great sign. Let us watch it from the silence of the “desert” prayer: «What every Christian has to do at all times [to pray], he ought to do it now more carefully and more devotedly: we shall then abide by the apostolic institution of the forty days» (Saint Leo the Great, pope).