

SUNDAY PLUS

Listen and follow

By Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

One of the most intriguing stories in the pages of the Bible is the tale of Jonah, the runaway prophet. Jonah is commanded by God to go to the great city of Nineveh and tell the people that God is going to destroy them in forty days. Jonah believes that because God is merciful, the city will not be destroyed – hence he will look a buffoon after his all-to-be-wiped-out speeches. Instead of going to Nineveh, he decides to go to Spain on a runaway package holiday. At least in Tarshish no one will laugh at him for being a failure.

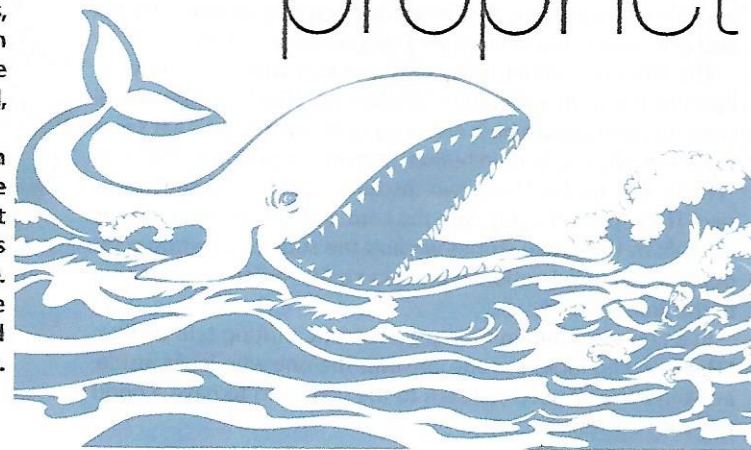
Jonah makes the mistake of thinking he can travel out of God's reach, but he is in for a wet surprise. He buys his ticket, boards the ship and settles


down to sleep for the voyage. There is a great storm and the ship threatens to break up. The captain orders Jonah to get up and pray and when Jonah sees how close disaster is for everyone, he admits that he is the cause and tells the sailors to throw him overboard. Since tossing passengers overboard is not a permissible pastime for sailors, they are reluctant to oblige; but when the seas grow rougher, they change their mind. With Jonah overboard, there is calm again.

The image is clear: Jonah is taken into the depths to be born again. If the hero is to pass onwards, he must first pass inwards. Something in Jonah has to give, something in Jonah has to die. Illumination will come only after the experience of annihilation. So, God sends Jonah on a retreat for three days.

Fr Denis McBride's many books, CDs and DVDs are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

The fugitive prophet



Let us pray for the grace to be docile to the voice of the Lord and for a heart open to the Lord, for the grace not to be afraid to do great things and the sensitivity to pay attention to the small things.  Amen.

What about you?

By Natasha Pritchard

The New Testament is full of examples of people who, filled with faith, renounced everything to follow Jesus. Simple fishermen gave up their livelihoods without question after one command: "Come, follow me". The disciples must have really seen something special in Jesus.

Do we trust Jesus enough to give our lives fully over to him? Do we recognise him, just as the disciples did, as somebody for whom it's worth taking that leap of faith?

God calls the most unlikely people to become followers, then leaders. The women who followed him become the only people who remain with Jesus until the end. Paul, the persecutor of Christians becomes one of the most fervent believers, leading and instructing Christian communities. Peter, a fisherman who had enough faith to put down his nets, becomes the first leader of Christianity.

What about you? What is God calling you to do today?

Natasha Pritchard has worked in Catholic hospital chaplaincy and youth ministry, and is now Area Support Chaplain at Methodist Homes.

Feast of the week
Thursday 25 January

The Conversion of St Paul the Apostle

The moment of St Paul's conversion marked a change in the course of salvation history. It exposed the Church's universality and its openness to pagans, Gentiles and those who were not Israelites, which the Lord permitted because it was important.

First of all, he was consistent, because he was a man open to God. If he persecuted Christians, it was because he was convinced that God desired it. But how can that be? Never mind how: he was convinced of it. This is the zeal he carried for the purity of the house of God, for the glory of God. A heart open to the voice of the Lord. And he risked all and charged ahead. Another characteristic of his actions is that he was a docile man – full of docility – and was not hard-headed.

Even though he was stubborn, St Paul was not hard-hearted. He was open to God's indications.

He had incarcerated and killed Christians with a fire inside him, but as soon as he heard the voice of the Lord, he became like a child, letting himself be led.

All his convictions stayed silent, waiting for the voice of the Lord: "What must I do, Lord?" And he went to that encounter at Damascus, to meet that other docile man, and let himself be catechized like a child and be baptized like a child. Then he regains his strength, and what does he do? He is silent. He leaves for Arabia to pray, for how long we don't know. Maybe years, we don't know. Docility. Openness to the voice of God and docility. His is an example for our life.

Pope Francis

Today:
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

Monday:
2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10
Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday:
2 Samuel 6:12-15, 17-19
Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday:
2 Samuel 7:14-17
Mark 4:1-20

Thursday:
Acts 22:3-16 or 9:1-22
Mark 16:15-18

Friday:
1 Timothy 1:1-8 or
Titus 1:1-5
Luke 10:1-9

Saturday:
2 Samuel 12:1-7, 10-17
Mark 4:35-41

Next Sunday:
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28