

Reflection-1/21/18- by Cathy Dempsey
Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
Jonah 3:1-5, 10. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. Mark 1:14-20

If you ever read anything by Fr. Thomas Keating, you may recall him frequently saying, “To repent means to change the direction in which you are looking for happiness.”

If you’re not familiar with that quote, there is a more common saying you probably do recognize, which says pretty much the same thing: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results.”

I think today’s Scripture readings are all about repenting, making a change, frankly, figuring out what works to bring ourselves closer to God and one another, and then doing that. We all get into a rut of acting a certain way, responding to issues and problems in a certain way, just doing the same thing over and over again, and at some point we need to stop and hear God saying to us: “So how’s that working for you?”

In our first reading from Jonah, we heard how the Ninevites heard Jonah’s proclamation, his prophecy, that their current path was leading them to destruction. They were able to stop, recognize how the things they were doing were wrong, leading them to death and not to life, and they made a change. Our actions have consequences. If we make choices that tear down other people, God’s creation, our relationships, we end up tearing ourselves down too. I believe that God is about creating more and more life, building up life, love, relationships, true joy and

happiness. If we can stop, recognize our destructive patterns, and then change the direction we're moving to be in alignment with God's direction, then we can tap into God's grace, that kind of "multiplier effect" God has, and we begin to build up the world and start moving toward true happiness.

Now, our second reading today, from Corinthians, makes me a little worried at first glance. Paul admonishes the people, saying "From now on, let those having wives act as not having them." Excuse me?? Even if it's translated in a more gender-inclusive way: "From now on, let those having spouses act as not having them," Paul's words are a little bit, well, jarring. I'm not sure how I feel about Pete acting as if he didn't have me as a wife, and I think Pete would be a little uncomfortable with me acting as if he weren't my husband. The point Paul is trying to make, of course, is deeply rooted in the mind-set of his time—many people assumed Jesus would be coming again in glory, bringing an end to this world, within the next few weeks, months, maybe a few years. Paul is trying to instill a sense of urgency in people—"the world in its present form is passing away." And in a sense that's always true, things are always changing, the world is always changing.

I think Paul is trying to shake us out of our complacency; to help us have a vision of ourselves as growing and changing and transforming in Christ. He's encouraging us to seek more, to not see ourselves as just the limited roles we assign to ourselves. Yes, I'm a wife, and that's a really important facet of who I am, but God is calling me to be more than that—to grow into the person God sees me as. If I

am weeping, that's fine, but I'm called to be and do more than that. If I'm rejoicing, that's great too, but I'm called to be and do more than that. I have to be willing to let God change me. I have to be willing to change the direction in which I'm looking for happiness, true happiness.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to drop their fishing nets and follow him. And they do. They just drop everything, and make a huge change. I'm sure they were going along, feeling just fine about being fishermen—this is what they did, this is what they were. And there's nothing at all wrong about being fishermen—good, honest, hard work. Maybe a little smelly, but it's an honest living. Not like they were those sinful, horrible people of Nineveh. But even so, God called them to make a change, a big change, and they did.

So the question I am left asking myself, after reading and praying with these Scriptures today is: What are the changes I need in my life to grow deeper in my relationship with God? What are the things that aren't working for me, in terms of being the person God is calling me to be? There may be some big changes God is calling me to, or maybe just some small changes that can make a big difference. How am I being called to repent?