

Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany (2021)

by Fr Nick Mezacapa

Well, I think the theme of the day, at least the theme that I would offer up to you for your consideration, is the whole idea of urgency. Urgency. Jesus called those fishermen in the boat, and immediately he said, they came, they followed him. And Jonah goes into Nineveh and the people turn it around. They didn't wait, they turned it around right away, so that God would give them God's grace. And so this whole idea of urgency is one I want to focus on, at least for a few minutes today with you. As you read Corinthians, the epistle today, you get the same idea. Paul writes to the church of Corinth, "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short. From now on, live in a new way. The present form of this world is passing away."

Now I've often wondered why Paul was so concerned with the church that he had established in Corinth. Especially on this day, as we read about the urgency that he urges them to have. Because in both the first and second letters to the Corinthians, he admonishes them about losing their connection to his message and their diversion from a sense of spiritual urgency that he had preached— the love, the hope, the resurrection. He called them to end their squabbling and their entangled egos, interpretive variations, and boasting, and to go back to the urgent business of building a loving community. For Paul, in short, their distortions had displaced living in Christ. Nothing, he said, is of value without the love of God in Jesus Christ. Nothing was more important than

focusing your life through that love, with that love, *now*. Availing yourselves with the love of God, to one another.

Makes me think of a story that Bishop Stough, the former Bishop of Alabama, who died in 2004, told once at a bishops' conference. Bishop Stough told the story of the "Great Gem". "The Gem of Great Value." This guy goes into the little storefront and he sees there in the front, in this case, a gem. Huge thing, very valuable. He goes up to the store owner and asks about this huge gem. He says, "Tell me about his stone." And the store owner says, "Oh, it's for sale." And the guy says, "No, it can't be for sale!" "Oh, it's for sale." And the guy says, "Well how much is that great gem there, in the case?" And the store owner says, "Well, everything you've got." And the guy laughs and says, "What do you mean, everything?" And the storeowner says, "What do you got? Do you got any money?" And the guy reaches into his pocket, and says, "Oh yeah, 32 dollars." And the owner of the store says, "I'll take that." And the guy says, "Wow, that's something! Well, I hope I still have my keys and there's gas in the car." And the store owner says, "You've got a car?" And the guy says, "Yeah." "Oh, I'll take the keys. I'll take your car too." And the guy says, "Ooo, I don't know how I'm going to get home." And the store owner says, "Oh, you've got a home?" And the guy says, "Well, yeah." The store owner says, "Here, give me the keys to your house." And he gives him the keys to his house. And the guy says, "Well, now I'll have to live up in the cabin, I guess. Up in the cottage, up north." And the store owner says, "Oh, you've got a cabin? I'll take that too."

And the guy reaches into his pocket and gives him the keys to his cabin. A store owner, the owner of the great gem, says, "That's everything?" And the guy says, "That's everything. That's everything I've got." The store owner says, "I'll tell you what. Here are the keys to the cabin. Take them back. But they are going to be times when I'm going to need to send folks there for refreshment, and retreat, and peace. So I hope they can use it." "Oh, sure!" "And here's the house keys. You can take them back too. But there will be times when I'll need a place to sleep. If you can help me out that would be great. If I can use the house, it would be much appreciated." "Sure, that would be fine!" And the store owner gives him the keys back to the house. And the car, he gives the keys back to the car. "I'm going to need transportation some time, so if you'll just oversee the car, that'd be wonderful." And he gives back the money and says, "Oh, you'll probably need some gas for the car. And that'll help us both out." And that's the end of the story.

And that's how it is. That's what this urgency is about. And as the Church today, we live called by the same reset. The same urgency that God has given access to our loving responses. We need to be good stewards of what we have, but don't own. Don't let what you have, own you. Rather, stand ready, ready to give all that you have, with a sense of urgency, in the spirit of the one Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.