Contemplation on the Book of Jonah the Prophet

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CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JONAH THE PROPHET

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter One: The Problem of the Fleeing Prophet

Chapter Two: Gentile Mariners are better than Jonah

Chapter Three: Jonah in the Belly of the Fish

Chapter Four: Nineveh the Great City

Chapter Five: Saving Jonah from His Obduracy and Pride

Chapter Six: God in the Book of Jonah



INTRODUCTION

The Book of Jonah the Prophet is full of wonderful spiritual contemplation. Our aim in this book is to tackle purely the spiritual side, and not the theological side.

Our aim is to benefit and not to debate. We wish to take from this beautiful Book beneficial lessons for our life. We wish to benefit from God's work and from people's virtues and faults.

How beautiful is the Church's choice! She chose this book to be the prelude of the forty days of Lent! A beautiful story of repentance and fasting precedes the Great Lent by two weeks, that we may approach the holy forty days with a clean heart attached to the Lord.

It is remarkable that many of those who study the Book of Jonah concentrate on the people of Nineveh and their fast and overlook the mariners and Jonah with his problem.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF THE FLEEING PROPHET

Jonah's Problem

In the Book of Jonah, God wants us to know an important fact: that **the prophets were not of a different nature but were people** *"with a nature like ours" (James.5:17),* **having weaknesses, shortcomings and faults, and it was possible for them to fall like us**. The only thing was that the grace of God worked in them

and gave them power. It was not their power but the power of the Holy Spirit working in their weakness, that the power may be of God and not of us, according to the Apostle's words *(2 Cor. 4:7).*

Jonah the Prophet was one of the weak persons of the world whom God chose to put to shame the mighty ones (*1 Cor. 1:27).* He had faults and he had virtues, and the Lord chose him despite his faults, worked through him, in him and with him, and designated him to be a great and saintly prophet, the dust of whose feet we are unworthy of. In so doing God also shows us that He can work with us and use our weakness as He did with Jonah.

Falls in Jonah's Fleeing

We shall see some of Jonah's weaknesses in his attitude towards the Lord's call. The Holy Bible says: *"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amity, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry, out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me'. But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:1-3).*

Here we see the Prophet Jonah falling into a number of lapses.

The first lapse was disobedience and rebellion.

Jonah was not able to obey the Lord in this matter, while he was a prophet whose work was but to call people to the Lord's obedience. When we fall into the lapse of disobedience we ought to have compassion on those who fall into disobedience, putting before us the Apostle's saying: "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them" (Heb. 13:3).

If God, the Holy One, who alone is without sin, has compassion on those who fall, how much more ought we who similarly fall do so. Even so, Jonah fell yet he did not have compassion!

The fall of disobedience into which Jonah fell bid behind it a more serious fall which was pride, typified in his high esteem to his word. He was too aloft to say a word that would be disproved and not carried out.

His esteem to his word was what induced him to disobey. Truly one sin leads to another in an unending sequence.

Jonah knew for sure that God was merciful and compassionate, and that He would forgive the city if it repented. Here is the root of the problem! In what way will it ail you, Jonah, if God is merciful and forgiving?

It will greatly ail me: I will say something to people and my words will be disproved. I will cry out that the city will be overthrown because of its sins, but the city will not be overthrown. My word will be disproved and I will be stigmatized. I cannot walk with this Lord all the way. If He abided by His warning I would have remained with Him. I shall cry out against the city, the city will repent, and God will return and show compassion and spare the city, and my word will be disproved. Therefore, in order to safeguard my own honor, my reputation and the awesomeness of the prophecy, it is better for me not to go.

To such an extent was Jonah self-centered! He was not able to abnegate himself for the sake of people's salvation. His reverence, honor, and word were more important to him than the salvation of a whole city!

He had no objection to working with the Lord on the grounds that

the Lord would preserve for him his honor and the awesomeness of his word. That was why he fled from the presence of the Lord refusing to carry out this errand **that would hurt his pride.**

He was honest with the Lord in revealing his inner feelings. For when the Lord upbraided him afterwards, he said: *"Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jon. 4:2).*

Jonah's fleeing from the presence of the Lord carried within it other sins, namely, foolishness and lack of faith.

This one who flees from the Lord, to where will he flee when the Lord is omnipresent? O great prophet, do you not believe that God is present in every place to which you flee? God is present in the ship which you will board, and in the sea which will bear the ship, and in Tarshish to which you wish to escape.

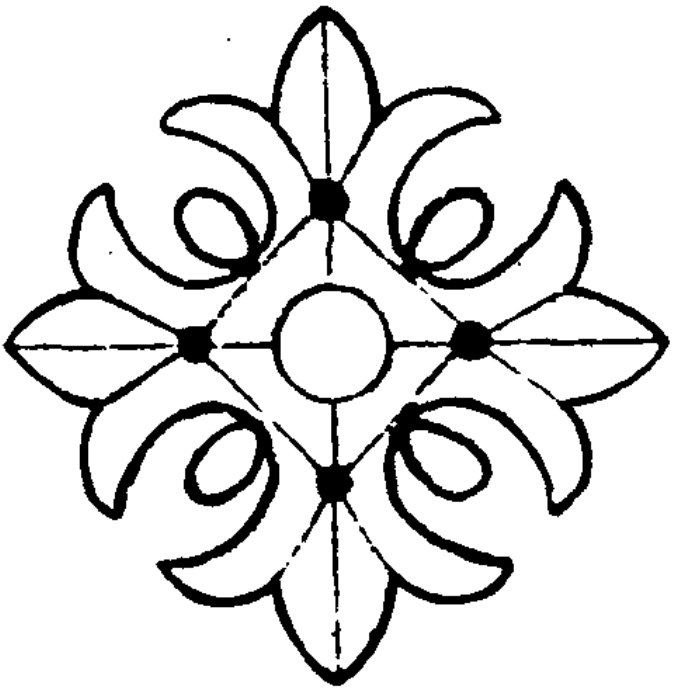
So where do you wish to hide from the presence of the Lord?

Rightly did David the Prophet say to the Lord: *"Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hands shall hold me"(Ps. 139:7-10).*

Jonah was like his forefather Adam who thought that he could hide from the presence of the Lord behind the trees!

Did Jonah think that God was not present in the ship or in the sea and that he could slip out of His hand? Was this not utter foolishness, and lack of faith in God's infinite omnipotence? Or was

it a childlike behavior of a helpless confused person who did not know what to do'? He did not know that God's command would pursue him everywhere. Indeed, sin extinguishes the light of perception in a man, making him forget even matters of intuition.



In Joppa, Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare and went down into it.

How amazing that sin cost Jonah both money and effort; he paid the fare for the journey to accomplish his sin. As for grace, we obtain it free. It is amazing that we toil for our own hurt, expending money and effort. Perhaps it would have been a blessing to Jonah if he had not the money at the time to help him travel and disobey.

When Jonah paid the fare of the ship, he suffered a double loss.

He lost his money, his obedience and purity of heart.

This is a glimpse of Jonah's faults when he fled and disobeyed.

What was God's attitude?

It is amazing that God used Jonah's disobedience for good.

Indeed God is able to use all things for the glory of His name.

God Uses All

Jonah disobeyed God's command and fled in a ship, but God who brings *"out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet" (Judg. 14:14);* **God who is able to turn evil into good**, was also able to make use of Jonah's disobedience.

If it was through Jonah's obedience that the people of Nineveh were to be saved, it was through his disobedience that the mariners would be saved.

When Jonah disobeyed the Lord he went down into a ship where there was a people belonging to the Lord, whom the Lord loved and sought to save. They were gentiles like the people of Nineveh, and were likewise in need of salvation. Let their salvation be through Jonah's disobedience. Jonah was an instrument in the hand of the Lord by which He conquered, with its obedience and with its disobedience.

It was as though the Lord said to Jonah: **"Do you think, Jonah, that you have fled from Me? No, you have not. I will send you to**

the mariners, not as a prophet, nor as a preacher, nor as a voice crying out calling people to repentance, but as a guilty person and a sinner, and a cause of a dilemma and trouble for others. Thus I will save them through you."

"In this way you will be a blessing when I send you and a blessing when you flee. You will be a blessing to the people of Nineveh when they dread you as a prophet, and a blessing to the mariners when you are cast out into the sea as a guilty person. I will carry out My purpose through you in whatever state. Even when you are in the belly of the whale, not among the Ninevites nor the mariners, but when you are on your own in the belly of the whale, I will make you a prototype of My death and resurrection so that in mentioning your story people will learn.

"Did you sail in the sea when you were fleeing from Me, O **Jonah? Then you entered also in the domain of My will**, because I own the sea as I own the earth; both are the work of My hand. The waves of the sea and the fish therein obey Me more than you do, as you will see".

Indeed God is beneficent; He can perform good out of every thing. He could make use of Pilate's cowardice and Judas' betrayal in the act of salvation. Anything that comes into the hand of God will surely yield something good. God saves by all possible means people, and as the apostle said: *"all things work together for good to those who love God," (Rom. 8:28).*

Therefore, my brother, try to benefit from all the incidents and tribulations that encounter you. Benefit from a friend's infidelity and from a son's disobedience, from illness and from health. Emulate God who out of the strong brings something sweet.

We also notice in the Book of Jonah that, in the same way God used Jonah's rebellious attitude and disobedience in performing His will, He also used irrational creatures who were more obedient than the prophet.

The Obedience of the Irrational Creatures

The Lord shamed Jonah by the obedience of the Ninevites, the faith and righteousness of the mariners, and also by the obedience of the inanimate objects and the irrational creatures.

How marvelous it is to see all these on divine missions and official errands which they performed to the best and most perfect degree.

What were those irrational creatures that were beneficial elements in accomplishing the Divine purpose?

When Jonah went down into the ship, the Divine Inspiration tells us: *"But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up" (Jon. 1:4).*

The wind performed its duty. It was a messenger sent by the Lord. It led people to prayer so that everyone cried out to his god. The prophet went down into the ship, unconcerned about calling people to prayer, whereas this stormy wind succeeded in what the prophet failed. In this is a fulfilment of the words of the Psalm: *"Stormy wind, fulfilling His word" (Ps. 148:8).* We sing these beautiful words twice a day in the fourth antiphon, contemplating this wind which fulfils His word.

In the same way that this stormy wind performed its duty at the

beginning of the story, so it performed another duty at its end, where the Holy Bible says: *"And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself" (Jon. 4:8).* Thus Jonah came to reasoning with God which ended in his reconciliation to God.

This was due to that stormy wind which was fulfilling His word.

Is it not beautiful that this wind is described with more or less the same expression given to the mighty in strength, the angels of God, *"who do His word, heeding the voice of His word" (Ps.* 103:20)?

In the same way that God used the wind He also used the whale to fulfil His purpose. In this respect the Holy Bible says firstly: *"Now, the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jon. 1:17),* then returns and says: *"So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jon. 2:10).*

Thus the whale received Divine commands and carried them out accurately, circumspectly and according to the Lord's purpose.

In the same way that God used the wind and the whale He also used the sun, the worm, and the plant. The Holy Bible says: *"And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah" (Jon. 4:6),* and says: *"But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered" (Jon. 4:7),* and also says: " *And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind,* and the sun beat on Jonah's head" (Jon. 4:8).

All creatures are in the hand of God. He uses them according to His

purpose and in accordance with His will. They are in His hand malleable and submissive. He says to them: "Go, O wind! Go, O sun! Go, O wave! Go, O worm!... and everything is accomplished, without dispute. All these creatures are faithful messengers. Thus God used the inanimate objects to convince man, and used the irrational creatures to shame the rational.

In the Book of Jonah, all these creatures were obedient to God. The only creature who was not obedient was the rational Jonah whom God had granted free will by which he could disobey Him!

It is true that frequently man misuses his intellect and his freedom. Many a time does man trust in his own wisdom so much that it conflicts with God's will. Accordingly, the Holy Bible says: *"And lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5)* and gives the reason by the maxim which is mentioned twice in the Book of Proverbs: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12 & 16:25).* Man is always self-elated over his own discretion and prudence. This is why the Holy Bible says: *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes" (Prov. 21:2).* Even so is the foolish *(Prov. 12:15).* Such is man. As for other creatures they know nothing but obedience. However, not all men were disobedient in the Book of Jonah. All people obeyed except Jonah the Prophet!

Perhaps the most important obedience God requires from us is the obedience in the difficult missions, and He gave us an example by the obedience of all the other creatures.

We may be pleased and rejoice when God sends us to deliver joyful tidings and in us are fulfilled the words of the Holy Bible: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15).* We rejoice for those missions for the vain-glory we gain through people's praise and

thanksgiving. As for the difficult missions they are burdensome to us, and when we carry them out, we do that for the sake of God alone.

How difficult is a mission in which God requests one of His children to cry out against a city that it will be overthrown.

Abraham the Patriarch interceded for Sodom, pleading that it might not be destroyed, although he was not commissioned to cry out against it, but he could not bear the news of its destruction even though from afar.

Jonah did not flee from carrying out the errand due to his commiseration over Nineveh's destruction. On the contrary, he fled for fear that the city should subsist and not perish. He did not say any compassionate word nor did he intercede for it as Abraham did for Sodom, but he was sad, vexed and was exceedingly displeased, and saw that death was better for him than life. All this was because God did not fulfil his warning to destroy the city. Was that a sort of obduracy or hard heartedness on Jonah's part? Or did his esteem to his word supersede all else, even love and compassion? I do not know.

As for all the other creatures in the Book of Jonah, they carried out all the Lord's orders, whether they were seemingly joyful or troublesome. It was enough for them that these orders proceeded from the mouth of God.

God ordered the wind to buffet the ship vigorously so that the ship was about to break. The wind did as God commanded, and it was so. It did not say, "Why should the peaceful innocent mariners bear the brunt? Why should I cause them a great tempest in the sea?" No. It did not. We are not more compassionate than God. God

proved His all wise disposition by which He led the mariners and the passengers to faith.

God willed that the sea should rage and it did rage, and willed that it should become quiet after throwing Jonah into it, and it did become quiet. **How wondrous is the obedient nature which, unlike man, carries out all God's orders.**

God ordered the whale to swallow Jonah and it swallowed him without harming him because it did not receive an order from God to eat him. Then God ordered the whale to vomit Jonah onto dry land, and it vomited him where it pleased God.

I sometimes pause in amazement, contemplating how these creatures received orders from God and how they understood them and carried them out! They have no intellect and cannot discern. It was all due to God's will acting in them.

In the same way that God ordered the great fish to carry out part of the Divine plan, He also gave an order to the little worm. He ordered it to smite the plant, and the plant withered.

How amazing to see that even the worm is part of the complete holy act of God. Indeed how beautiful are the words of the Holy Bible: *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt. 18:10).* **God's will is carried out in the way that accords with His pleasure, not as nature in its foolishness, dictates. Wise is he who resigns to God's will whatever it is.**

God ordered the plant to grow and be shade for Jonah's head in order to "deliver him from his misery", and it carried out this compassionate order. God commissioned the sun to beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint and desired death, and it did as the Lord ordered. It is not kinder to Jonah than God. There must be

a benefit behind the sun's beating otherwise God would have not ordered it to happen. And it was so.

Indeed nature and all the irrational creatures in their relation with God are similar to the heavenly inhabitants.

They only know the term *"Your will, be done"*.

May we take a lesson from all these creatures and realize also the depths of the term "Your will be done" in our life and in people's lives. Jonah failed to observe this term and could not attain to it until after many trials and wrestles with God, and after punishment and convincements. Finally God succeeded in convincing him of the goodness of His Divine will no matter how incompatible it was with his own.

God created the intellect as a blessing to man. Many a time this intellect stands as an obstacle between man and the life of surrender!

This happens when the intellect works alone detached from the illumination of the Holy Spirit and detached from humility by which the intellect stoops down, submitting to God's will.

Someone touched his head, saying: "This is Adam's apple". He means that his mind is the cause of all his falls and trials. **The mind is not the only thing which stands against the will of God** when convinced with other matters that disagree with His order or when it puts God's orders in the crucible of investigation and analysis. There is also the passion which may desire things forbidden by the Lord and therefore it may stand against the will of God.

Hence when man's intellect and passion are in the hand of

God, then man's will is in accordance with God's will.

Man's obedience will be out of assurance, convincement, and love for God's commandments. Man's obedience will be rejoicing at God's commandments and orders as he who finds great treasures as David did. If man's will contradicts with God's will, man will suffer imbalance whether in his thinking or in the desires of his heart.

In the case of incompatibility of these two wills, man has to choose between two ways of obedience: either he humbles himself, blaming himself, admitting his error and trying to reform his inner self in order to accept God's will gladly, or forces himself to obey whether or not he understands God's will, whether or not he accepts it from within. The important thing is that he must obey and say to the Lord in every matter: "*Your will be done"*.

However, Jonah could not say to the Lord, "Your will be done". He could not humble himself before the Lord. He could not coerce himself to obedience. Thus God Himself had to intervene as we will see next.



CHAPTER TWO: GENTILE MARINERS ARE BETTER THAN JONAH

How wonderful were the mariners of that ship which Jonah took! It is true that they were gentiles, but they had exquisite virtues which made them surpass the great prophet, and in them was fulfilled the Lord's oracle: *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John.* 10:16).

The mariners of this ship remind me of Cornelius the centurion

whose outward semblance was a gentile, alien from God's congregation, but in fact he was a God fearing virtuous man, he and all his household. He was also merciful, giving alms generously and praying constantly. He deserved to see an angel in a vision, saying to him: *"your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God" (Acts 10:31).*

He also deserved the descent of the Holy Spirit, together with all those who were present, when Peter was talking to them *(Acts 10).*

In the realm of holiness there are many unknown persons, but they are known by name to the Lord. Such were the mariners of that ship. They had every beautiful attribute. As they lacked faith, it seemed good to God to grant it them. **It might have been a Divine disposition that Jonah took that particular ship both for his and its sake.** God did not allow Jonah to go to a faraway city for his own good and for the good of the mariners. It is amazing that God prepared for him the place where he would flee to from the presence of the Lord, the place which suited him, where he heard a beneficial word, the place where he stood once more in the presence of God in order to be corrected. God prepared for him the holy environment which reproached him for his escape. He found himself among people better than himself in all respects in order to save the gift of prophesying.

The Mariners' Virtues

The first beautiful attribute of the mariners of this ship was that they were men of prayer.

When they were attacked by the storm which was about to break the ship, the Holy Bible says: "*Then the mariners were afraid and everyman cried out to his god" (Jon. 1:5).* Here we notice that they

resorted to God prior to taking any necessary action dictated by human discretion to save the situation. They prayed first then they cast out their wares in order to lighten the load of the ship. Thus they held prayer on a higher level than their maritime skills, relying more on it.

When they awakened Jonah, they did not say to him: "Arise and help us to lighten the load of the ship", but they said: "Arise, call on your God, perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish". **The mariners and all those who were on the ship were praying at that time. The only person who was not praying was Jonah, God's prophet!**

Even after they had awakened him the Holy Bible does not say that he woke up and prayed!

Truly, it was an embarrassing situation! Jonah "had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down and was fast asleep". It is amazing that the great prophet was asleep at the time at which the gentiles were praying. This is very embarrassing! What makes it more shameful is when the gentile ship captain went to him, reproaching him, saying: "What do you mean, sleeper?" What is this indolence, slothfulness and indifference? Why do you not rise up and pray like the rest of the people? "Arise, call on your God perhaps, your God will consider us, so that we may not perish".

Do you really care for your honor, Jonah? Where is this honor, when you are the only one who is asleep and the gentiles around you are praying and reproaching you for your sleep?

How wondrous is the Lord! He reproves one of his prophets through a gentile! If God had sent him an angel to reproach him or even another prophet like him it would have been more admissible. If his reproof would not be through an angel or a prophet, then let it

be through an ordinary believer.

To be reproached by a gentile, a heathen, a man who does not know God, is utter humiliation to make him feel the extent of his triviality and the depth of his sin. At any rate, God knows that reproof is useful even for prophets so he did not deprive Jonah from this grace and it pleased Him that it should be through a gentile to be more effective.

This is God's way of reproving.

When God wanted to reprove His people, He sent them the gentiles who surpassed them in faith, reproaching them. And the Lord said to them: *"Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness" (Matt. 8:11-12).* He reproached them by the Canaanite woman who was of an accursed nation. And He reproached them also by, the good Samaritan who was of a race perverted in faith, dogma and tradition, yet who became better than the priest and the Levite, the servants of God.

God rebuked the Pharisee, the most conceited of all people, by the tax collector, who was despised as a sinner, and also by the sinful woman who wet the feet of the Lord with her tears and was more virtuous and loving than the Pharisee.

In this same way the Lord reprimanded Jonah the great prophet.

He reproached him by the gentile mariners who rebuked him to arise and pray like them.

It is strange that Jonah was fast asleep at that time. He was so fast asleep that neither the storm nor the tempest nor the buffeted ship

awoke him.

How could he disobey God, break His commandment and flee from Him, and yet was able to sleep so deeply? His conscience must have also been dormant like him. When a person disobeys God, he may become frightened, agitated, perturbed and suffers insomnia and distress, and his sin haunts and pursues him. As for Jonah, he fled from God and was indifferent. With a very relaxed and undisturbed mind he was able to sleep heavily! I imagine that there was a reason behind that deep sleep. Undoubtedly Jonah after all he did, was justifying himself, considering himself innocent in what he had done. Thus he did not feel his guilt nor was worried, but was able to sleep.

Another beautiful attribute of the mariners of this ship was that they were searching for God.

They did not say frantically to Jonah: "Arise and cry out to our god", but they said: "Arise, call on your God". This indicates that they were seeking God and did not know where to find Him. They did not know the true God, but they loved Him and believed in Him without perceiving Him. That is why God revealed Himself to them in the story of Jonah.

Their third beautiful attribute was that they were men of simplicity and faith. Not only did they pray but they also cast lots. They believed that God will disclose to them the truth in that way, and it happened so. They cast lots to know "for whose cause this trouble has come upon" them.

In their righteousness the mariners shrunk from the abomination of sin, perceiving that it was the cause of all man's afflictions. As mariners, they did not say that the great

tempest was because of the sea, the nature of the waters and the change of wind, but they realized that it was due to a sin committed by one of them, a requisition of the Divine Justice.

Thus they sought "whose cause" that trouble was.

The lot fell on Jonah. Indeed God is kind and good. Even if gentiles pray to Him with an upright conscience, pleading for His guidance, He listens to them and answers their prayer. The fact that the lot fell on Jonah revealed another good attribute in the God-fearing mariners of this ship.

They were also just. They did not pronounce a sentence against any person rashly, but were long-suffering, conscientious and scrupulous.

They could have got rid of Jonah there and then after the lot had fallen on him, especially when he appeared to be a stranger: he was fast asleep while all others were praying, he was of an unknown race, and God disclosed him after they all had cried out to Him in prayer.

They wanted to have a clear conscience, so they questioned him, saying: "Please tell us, who are you? What is your occupation? Where do you come from?" Many questions!

Indeed they were amazingly long-suffering, **I am surprised at their justice and at the sensitivity of their conscience. The ship was on the verge of sinking, the sea was raging and they might perish at any moment.**

Nevertheless, they insisted on questioning Jonah in order to have a clear conscience and not to deal unjustly with a human

being. They did this despite all the proofs they had in hand but they believed that they should not pronounce anyone guilty without prior judgment. It did not conform with them to pronounce a person guilty without giving him an opportunity to defend himself.

As for Jonah, he confessed to them, saying: "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land". As soon as they heard those words they were exceedingly afraid.

They were simple people who believed others.

Is your God Jonah the God of the sea and the dry land? We are now in the sea, so we are in the hand of your God. We want to reach the dry land and your God is also the God of the dry land, therefore we are in His hand. 'That is why they were afraid and reproached him, saying: Why have you done this?" And for the second time the great prophet was reproached by the gentiles.

It was good that God allowed him to be in that ship whose mariners reproached him without being embarrassed from him as a prophet.

In as much as the mariners were just, they were also extremely merciful and compassionate.

When Jonah proved to be guilty, confessing before them his guilt that he had fled from the Lord, and after ensuring that all the trouble that befell them was because of him, they did not want to get rid of him although the sea was growing more tempestuous. They thought of a solution to save the man who was the cause of their trouble.

They were certain that he was guilty and worthy of death, yet it was not easy for them, merciful as they were, to put a man to death even if he was the cause of the loss of their possessions

and had brought the threat of danger to their lives.

It was not easy for them to lose him hastily. Thus they said to him: "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"

Search with us for a solution, because the sea is growing more tempestuous in a very disturbing way. Jonah said to them: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you" . For I know that this great tempest is because of me. Throw me into the sea. There is no solution for the problem other than this. Yet despite all this they were reluctant to throw him.

I am amazed at the great mercy of those righteous people.

They knew the cause of their problem and knew the remedy but their conscience did not allow them to put it into action. How can we kill this man even if his blood is lawful to us, even if he is guilty and worthy of death? Thus they rowed hard with all their might in order to bring the ship to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

They did their best to save Jonah, the sinful guilty man from death, but in vain. It was God's will that Jonah should be thrown into the sea, so he fell into those mariners' hands. In order to have a clear conscience, they cried out to the Lord, saying: "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood, for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You." Having realized that it was God's will and that they could not stand against it, "they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging."

Hence it is clear that those mariners had a pure and sensitive conscience to which they scrupulously wanted to remain loyal.

It was not a light matter for them to commit a sin no matter how pressing the external circumstances were and in spite of the justifying reasons. Their attitude towards Jonah was very noble, very merciful, and in accordance with the will of God.

They were people who had hearts prepared for God to work in. They were endeavoring to find God's will in order that they might carry it out. When the sea ceased its raging by their throwing Jonah into it they were assured of the presence of God in the matter. They believed in the Lord, offered Him a sacrifice and made vows. In their belief in the Lord they not only believed that He was God but by offering Him a sacrifice they professed their belief in the propitiation of blood.

Thus God triumphed in the first battle and fulfilled the salvation of the mariners through Jonah's disobedience.

Now there remained two other important things in God's design of salvation: the salvation of the Ninevites and the salvation of Jonah.



CHAPTER THREE: JONAH IN THE BELLY OF THE FISH

Jonah was thrown into the sea, yet he was not thrown unto death. God's Providence still held him, and God was still with His plan of sending him to the city of Nineveh for the sake of its salvation.

Is this man, O Lord, still suitable for this great ministry, after all that he has done?

Yes. This Jonah is My son, and My beloved. He is also My prophet, and I will send him to Nineveh. If he sinned I will correct him and

make him useful for My ministry. I will save his soul and save the city through him. This unpolished stone, I undertake to chisel until I make it suitable for building.

Indeed, God is wondrous in His long-suffering. He does not hastily abandon or become angry with His servants who fall.

He received Peter after he had denied Him, and confirmed him in his apostleship. We human beings are characterised by our quick temper, and by our being quick to punish and quick to cut our relationships. Whereas God is not like that. He kept Jonah in his ministry and preserved him safe and sound to accomplish his mission. When Jonah was thrown into the sea, the God of the sea received him to protect him from every evil.

When Jonah was thrown into the sea the Divine hand picked him up and carried him delicately that he might not perish or drown. God took him and placed him inside the whale to preserve him safe there. God had *“prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah" (Jon. 1:17).*

He did not prepare it to destroy him but to preserve him. The great fish wasn't a punishment but a shelter. Jonah was safer and more comfortable in the belly of the whale than if he were still in the ship struggling against the waves and the sea, and against fatigue, cold and wind.

This whale was sent by God to carry out the Divine will entrusted to it.

It did not have authority to eat Jonah nor to secrete digestive enzymes onto him to absorb him. No, but rather it swallowed him in order to take him into its inner bosom and keep him safe

there until he would approach his destination. The whale was a free means of transport by which Jonah reached the nearest point to his stop.

It was as though Jonah was in a protected submarine sailing underwater. That great fish was sent to rescue him from the sea and its tumults. It was like tribulations, appearing fearful from the outside while entailing within them all benefit. Jonah was inside the fish for three days, sound and not conquered by the whale, just as Christ was in the tomb for three days and was not conquered by death.

So should you be, blessed brother. If the Lord prepares for you a great fish to swallow you, do not fear, neither be troubled, nor grieve. From inside the belly of the fish bless the Lord as Jonah did.

Be assured that the whale can swallow you but it cannot harm you. It can never touch you without God's sanction. The time will surely come when the Lord will order it to vomit you onto dry land where you were before. Is God not the Creator of the whale, and are not its life and direction in His hand? If you are in tribulation, brother, then remember Jonah's whale and you will be reassured. You will know that the Lord is the one who has prepared this whale for you to grant you a particular virtue or a special grace.

Be careful not to complain whenever you are swallowed by a whale, for the whales of the sea of this world are many.

Do not say: "Why do You treat me like this, O Lord? Why did You prepare this whale to swallow me? Where were You, O Lord, when it was swallowing me? And why did You not rescue me?"

Know that God's answer is one: "Do not be afraid. It is enough for

you that you are with Me. Even if you are in the belly of the whale, I am with you. I will not disregard you nor abandon you." Therefore, my brother, do not be afraid. Remember the saying of the righteous Abba Paul, "He who flees from tribulation has fled from God".

That whale was extremely huge. It was "a great fish".

There are many huge whales, each one of them like a spacious room, able to swallow a boat together with those in it. When the great fish swallowed Jonah, Jonah looked and found himself as if in a large hall or in a pool. What did he do? He returned to his senses, knelt down and prayed in the belly of the whale, and the Lord beheld him and rejoiced:

Ah Jonah! I have wanted this prayer from you since the beginning of the story. The reason for all that has happened was to make you kneel down, even if in the belly of the fish, that we may reason together.

"For a long time I have wanted to talk to you and reason together, but you were angry, you fled and refused to talk. But now is an appropriate opportunity to reconcile together."

Jonah knelt and prayed to the Lord, and returned once again to his prophetic rites. He returned to his former image as an obedient God-loving man, firmly believing in God's promises.

He returned to his former state, trusting God and offering Him thanksgiving.

I was greatly affected by Jonah's prayer in the belly of the great fish, which is characterized by the spirit of prophecy, wondrous faith, and assurance of the unseen.

It is one of the greatest prayers I have ever read in my life. If only he had offered it, or a prayer of its like, before he had thought of fleeing from the Lord! Indeed tribulation is a school of prayer.

I was deeply affected by his saying: "I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction and He answered me", and I said in myself, "What is all this, Jonah? How has God answered you when you are still in the belly of the great fish? Would it not be more appropriate to say, 'I cried out to You, O Lord, answer me', so that you plead for your prayer to be answered rather than declaring it?"

Jonah saw with the eye of faith what the Lord would give him. He saw it as if it were before his eyes, and not as if he would obtain it later on, thus he said joyfully: "I cried out to the Lord...and He answered me". Jonah continued his wondrous prayer, saying to the Lord: "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice... all Your billows and Your waves passed over me... Yet I will look again toward Your Holy temple". With this faith Jonah could see himself outside the great fish, looking toward the temple of the Lord.

With this faith he was able to turn his prayer from petition into thanksgiving while he was still in the belly of the great fish, and thus he concluded his prayer by saying: *"But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9).*

What made you sure, O holy prophet, that the Lord heard your prayer and answered you, sanctioned that you come out of the whale and return once more to behold His temple? How far was that temple from you? It was far away in Jerusalem while you were in the belly of the whale, somewhere in the sea, exactly where you could not ascertain. But the prophet replies:

"I am completely confident that I will come out of the belly of the whale and accomplish my mission, because God's word is never disproved nor does it return empty."

"So long as God commanded that I should go to Nineveh, then I will go there and carry out His sacred will, undertake my preaching ministry, and then return to the temple of God to worship there. I will sacrifice to the Lord and offer my vows.

All this I see clearly and without doubt before my eyes. My present temporary state in the whale and the sea has no effect on this at all."

How amazing is this man in his faith! Indeed, he is the man of deep faith chosen by the Lord. We do not deny that a cloud engulfed him and he sinned against God, but his essence was still good.

He saw the future full of hope as though it were the present.

He offered thanksgiving to the Lord for the salvation which he had not yet received according to time, but which he had actually received according to the gift of revelation granted to prophets; the revelation of the man who has eyes open to see the Lord's visions as in an open book, and who enjoys God's promises before they are fulfilled.

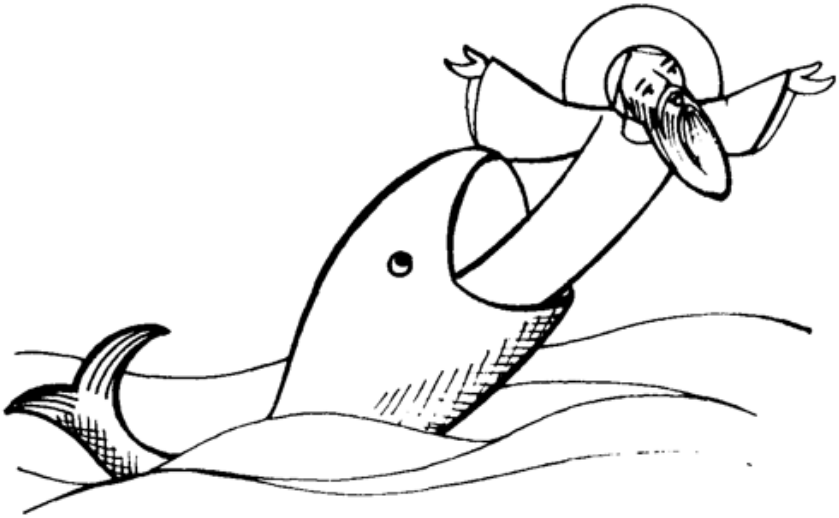
When Jonah's faith reached that wonderful level, the Lord ordered the whale to vomit him onto dry land.

That whale acted with great discipline according to an assuring predestined Divine plan. It appeared in the proper time and at the right place in order to carry Jonah in its belly. It was as though this prophet was being taken from an open ship liable to being covered

and drowned by the waves, into an enclosed and protected ship invulnerable to water and waves. In due time, the whale vomited Jonah onto dry land at the place which God defined. There it left him unharmed after it had fully completed its errand.

Congratulations, Jonah, on this wonderful submarine in whose bosom you lived for a while. It has brought to your mission.

Let us turn over this page in the life of Jonah as if it had never happened. As if the first two chapters of the Book have been forgotten by the Lord. O the Lord returned and said to Jonah anew: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach the message that I tell you."



CHAPTER FOUR: NINEVEH THE GREAT CITY

Jonah now goes to Nineveh

God gave Jonah the same command as before: "Arise, go to Nineveh." And this time Jonah did not flee from the presence of the Lord, but "arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord".

The command was fulfilled in quietness: God did not reproach nor

did Jonah object. This matter may need us to pause and contemplate.

God was not angered by Jonah's attitude so that He deprived him of his ministry or demoted him from the level of prophets to the level of ordinary believers, or looked for another to send instead.

God also did not reprove him. What had happened was enough for him. It was a practical lesson, needing no more words which might hurt the feelings of the person when reproved or reprimanded, scolded or taunted for a previous error. No. This is not God's way. God cares for the feelings of His children.

He leaves them to realize their own mistakes without taunting them.

Jonah had received a lesson, so he obeyed. Was it an obedience out of convincement and satisfaction or was it mere submission? Behold, Jonah! You are now going to Nineveh. What about the previous hindrances which prevented you previously about your honor? What about your word which you will say and which the Lord will not carry out because the city will repent and the Lord will return from His warning? Have you thought of all these things? Has the monster within you died, the monster of dignity and esteem of one's word?

This time Jonah was going to obey, but that was all, he was going to obey outwardly, but from within his honor still held its value. He was going to force himself for obedience's sake, then wait and see what God would do. This time he was going to meet God half way.

The love of dignity still troubled him, but he obeyed for fear of chastisement and not out of faith and humility.

He was carrying out God's command out of fear while his heart from within was rebelling, and this rebellion would show in due time. He was walking by the rod and not by grace. God accepted Jonah's state as merely a step that would lead to the obedience which springs from believing in God's wisdom and good governance.

Nineveh the Great City

How amazing is the title 'great city' which the Lord gave to Nineveh! The Lord repeated it twice to Jonah: *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city" (Jon. 1:2 & 3:2*). This expression was repeated a third time by the Divine Inspiration when we read:

"Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day journey extent" (Jon. 3:3). This title was repeated for the fourth time at the end of the Book when the Lord said: *"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much livestock?" (Jon. 4:11).*

How wondrous that the Lord calls it four times 'great city' **while it was a gentile and ignorant city whose people could not discern between their right hand and their left. It deserved the prophet's warning of destruction, being wicked, whose wickedness had come up before the Lord.**

As far as spiritual criteria are concerned, it had no aspect of greatness whatsoever!

Was it a condescension from God in using human expression, so He called it great being a capital city and having more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons?

Or did God behold it in its oncoming greatness in repentance, being a gentile that would reproach the Jews, as the Lord said of it: *" The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here"* (Matt. 12:41).

The title 'great city' which the Lord gave to Nineveh is a beneficial lesson to those who walk by the letter and are meticulous in their usage of terms so that they complicate matters and subject the spirit to the literal meaning of words!

God commanded Jonah to cry out against Nineveh's destruction, yet at the same time He was disposing salvation for its people. He loved them and wanted to save them, without them asking. **The Book of Jonah gives us a comprehensive idea of how God detests sin and yet at the same time has compassion on sinners and seeks their salvation.**

The saving of Nineveh gives us an idea of how God cares for the gentiles, because the Jews thought that God was only for them, and that it was only they who followed and worshipped Him, being His people and His flock. God showed them in the story of Nineveh that he had other sheep not of that flock. In the same way that He reproved His servant Jonah through the faith of the gentile mariners, He also reproved the Jews through the faith of the Ninevites and their repentance; that repentance which was indeed great in its depth and in its efficacy.

Nineveh's Greatness in Repentance

When God described Nineveh as being the great city, He was not considering its ignorance and sin but He was looking with great joy at its profound repentance.

Nineveh was quick in responding to God's word.

When Lot warned the Sodomites of the Lord's hot displeasure, they scorned him, and *"to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (Gen. 19:14),* whereas the Ninevites listened with utter seriousness to Jonah and responded quickly to his word, despite the respite of forty days which could have been taken for slackness and slothfulness. The word of the Lord was fast, bearing life, efficacious and sharper than a double-edged sword.

In their immediate response, the Ninevites were much greater than the Jews, who were contemporary to Christ the Lord, who is incomparably greater than Jonah. Those Jews saw the Lord's numerous miracles and beheld His infinite spirituality, yet they did not believe and repent. The Lord reproved them by the Ninevites *(Matt. 12:14).*

The word of the Lord was prolific. It yielded an abundance of amazing fruits.

The first fruit of the Ninevites was faith: "So the people of Nineveh believed God."

The second fruit was the unfeigned contrition of heart; humiliating themselves before the Lord. Thus they put on sackcloth "from the greatest to the least of them". And sackcloth is a rough material made of goats' hair; a sign of affliction, abstinence and rejection of worldly pleasures. Even the king of Nineveh himself took off his royal robe and covered himself with sackcloth, arose from his throne and sat in ashes.

The Lord looked at that debased city and smelt a pleasing aroma; for *"the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a*

contrite heart- these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Truly how wonderful is this unique spectacle! A whole city is seen contrite in dust and ashes, debased in sackcloth, from the king to the infant. Even the livestock were covered with sackcloth!

The word of God also yielded fasting and prayer.

The city proclaimed a general fast for all. People abstained from eating and drinking, and even the beasts, herds and flocks did not eat or drink. People did not want to be occupied with feeding their flocks so that they could spare their time for worship and supplication to God. Thus they mingled their fasting with prayer and cried "mightily to God".

The most important fruit of the Ninevites was repentance.

Repentance led them to faith because sin was an obstacle between them and God. The fruit of their repentance was their humiliation, fasting, wearing sackcloth and crying out to God.

Their repentance was a sincere repentance in every meaning of the word: serious and from the heart, in which everyone turned 'from his evil way and from the violence that was in his hands."

By this repentance they deserved God's mercy. He pardoned and forgave them, received them and joined them to His own. In this respect the Holy Bible says: *"Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it" (Jon. 3:10).*

The Holy Bible did not say: "When the Lord saw their fasting, prayer and affliction", but said: "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way". Therefore repentance was the reason for God's

mercy on them. Their fasting, prayer, and humiliation were but fruits of repentance.

I would like here to pause for a while at a verse said of the repentance of Nineveh, that is: "It repented at the preaching of Jonah".

What Was Jonah's Preaching?

The Holy Bible did not record for us the deep admonishing speech which led one hundred and twenty thousand persons to repentance with that wonderful contrition of heart. O that it supplied us with this excellent part in which concentrates all Jonah's greatness!

All that the Holy Bible records for us in this respect does not exceed one phrase in which was mentioned that Jonah entered the city and cried out, saying: *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon. 3:4).*

Could it be that Jonah said only this single sentence? Was it sufficient to save the city and cause that tremendous effect?

Previously, Lot had said of Sodom: *"The Lord will destroy this city!" (Gen. 19:14),* yet no one was affected and no one repented. The people heard of the Flood that was going to destroy the whole earth, and saw the Ark being built before their very eyes, yet no one repented and they were all destroyed. Many a time did the warning of death fail! Adam himself heard the warning: "you shall surely die", yet that warning did not prevent him from sinning.

What was the secret behind the repentance of Nineveh and its salvation?

Was it the thirst of Jonah's preaching and its deep effect on the

souls of the Ninevites? Or was it due to the strong inner readiness of the heart so that every Divine word brought about an effect because the heart was ready to hear, the will ready to put into action, and the soil good for sowing? In my heart, I lean towards this second opinion.

I would say that the repentance of the people of Nineveh was mainly due to the readiness of their hearts.

It was this readiness that made God send His prophet to them, and as the Apostle says: *"For whom He foreknew... He also predestined" (Rom. 8:29).* Indeed readiness of heart plays a major role in the act of repentance.

In the case of the rich young man, the Lord Himself talked to him, and with all the power and efficacy of the Lord's words, he went away sorrowful because the heart within was not ready.

This is similar to the stony places which do not yield fruit no matter how good the seeds are and no matter how experienced the sower is. The heart of the young St. Anthony, however, was ready to hear the word of God. When he heard in the church the same verse said to the rich young man, he was deeply affected and carried it out wholeheartedly. Likewise were the hearts of the Ninevites.

This opinion is confirmed to me by the fact that when Jonah said that the city would be overthrown, he said it while being sure in his heart that it was not going to be overthrown and that his word would not be carried out.

He cried out those words reluctantly, merely obeying an order given to him, unconvinced of what he was saying. If he were convinced, his words would have had a stronger effect.

However, Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching because their hearts were prepared for any word proceeding from the mouth of God. Thus their repentance was so powerful, for it sprang from within and not from without.

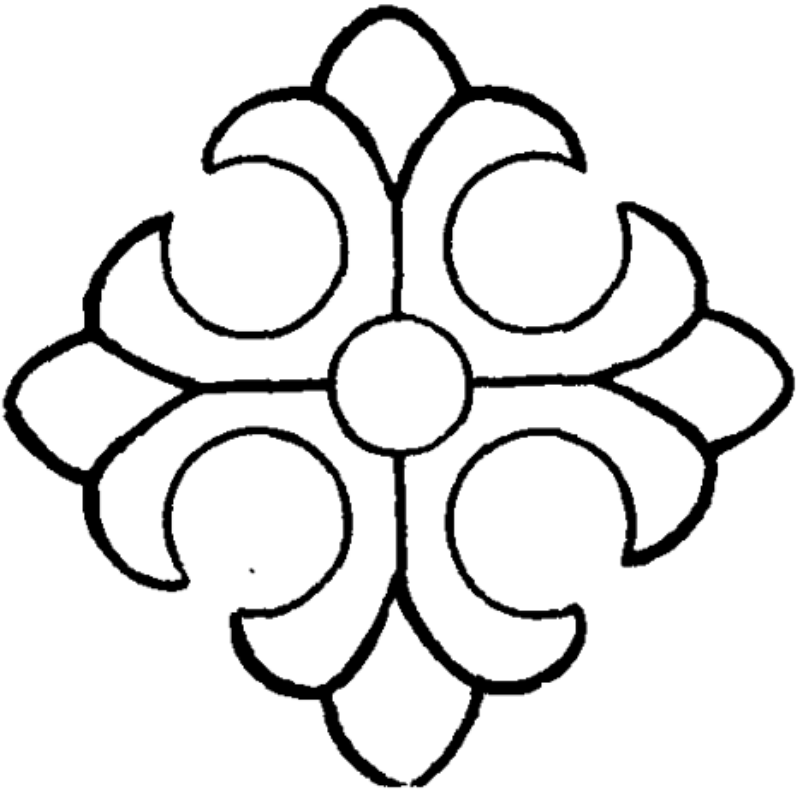
Accordingly, the Lord praised the people of Nineveh and their repentance, and said that they shall arise on the Day of Judgement and condemn that generation.

The power and beauty of this repentance is that it was a general repentance. Everyone repented, everyone returned to God, everyone believed in Him.

More than one hundred and twenty thousand persons entered the Lord's fold, one and all. If there is joy in heaven over one person's repentance what shall we say about the joy brought about by more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who previously could not discern between their right hand and their left?

Thus succeeded the second aim in God's design. The Ninevites were saved as the mariners had previously been saved.

Now it is Jonah's turn.



CHAPTER FIVE: SAVING JONAH FROM HIS OBDURACY AND PRIDE

There was joy in heaven over Nineveh's salvation.

God rejoiced. The angels rejoiced, congratulating one another, saying: "Nineveh has believed and repented, and one hundred and twenty thousand persons have 'joined the kingdom of God in one day."

However, amidst the rejoicing of heaven and the exultation of the angels there was one man who was miserable on account of this great salvation, and that was Jonah the Prophet.

He was very displeased because God had forgiven those people, had mercy on them and spared them. The Holy Bible expressed Jonah's displeasure in an amazing or rather a shameful sentence, saying: *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry" (Jon. 4:1).* How shocking! Does the salvation of people displease the prophet, and displease him exceedingly, and make him angry? All because those thousands were saved from perdition!

What then is the prophet's work other than the salvation of people? What joy is the prophet's other than joy over people's salvation? Jonah with this attitude reminds me of the elder son who was displeased and refused to enter the house because his brother had been dead and was alive again; and had been lost and was now found and was received gladly by his father. That elder brother was exceedingly displeased and became angry, exactly like Jonah. He tried with his anger to disturb the rejoicing, exactly like Jonah.

What was the secret hidden behind the Prophet Jonah's anger?

Jonah was still egocentric, thinking only of himself.

He did not think of Nineveh, nor of its repentance, nor of the great salvation that had taken place, nor of the kingdom of God and its edification. He was thinking of one sole thing, that was his ego. He was just like the elder son who thought of himself: how he had served his father for so many years, how he did not have a goat and had not made merry with his friends... *(Luke 15).* On a lesser level of self-centredness was Martha who was upset at the beautiful contemplative moments which her sister Mary enjoyed at the feet of

Christ. She was thinking of her own comfort and how she was not getting any help from her sister.

Jonah's thinking, however, was of a more serious type. He was still thinking of his dignity and of his word which was not carried out. It was the same thinking of old which had formerly induced him to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Due to that thinking he deprived himself of the fellowship of heaven's exultation. He separated himself from joining the hosts of angels in their joy over Nineveh's salvation. He proved by his anger that his way of thinking was subjective and not spiritual, and proved that his will was incompatible with the will of the heavenly Father *"who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).*

By his anger Jonah proved that he could not benefit from his past experience. He forgot the price he had paid in the belly of the great fish and in the ship threatened by drowning.

That lesson which he received from God had no effect on him, if, after that experience, he obeyed God outwardly yet remained unchanged from within. He did not rid himself of his egocentric nature nor of his personal dignity. God's ministry was not in his inner depths, neither was the love for people. These matters were just on the surface of his thoughts. As for his depths they contained the ego and its dignity more than all else!

It is amazing that Jonah prayed to God while in that spiritual downfall! How could he pray when he disagreed with God in the means and in the ends? How could he pray with such a heart void of love, and angry from God's dealings? I do not know. The matter is clarified and becomes even more amazing when he prayed to

complain and to justify himself, grumbling against God's treatment and requesting death for himself because death to him was far better than losing his dignity.

He sinned and did not confess his sin, but on the contrary he grumbled! Thus he prayed, saying: "Ah, Lord,...". But Ah rather from you, Jonah, who are concerned only with yourself and your dignity! What do you wish to say? Jonah continued his prayer, saying: *"Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I previously fled to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jon. 4:2).*

How does it ail you, Jonah, that God is merciful? Be sure that unless it was for His mercy, you also would have perished. His mercy has embraced everyone. As it embraced the people of Nineveh who repented and humiliated themselves before Him, it also embraced you who have not yet repented nor humiliated yourself and even your prayer involves self-justification, complaining, and grumbling.

Jonah cried out in his grumbling, saying: "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Has your anger reached that extent, Jonah, because your word was not carried out, that you saw death better for you than life?

First of all. you ought to know that it was God's word and not your own. You were but a deliverer of the message. The owner of the message was God Himself. If God in all His sublimity, greatness, and dominion has accepted that to happen, why do you not accept it and you are but dust and ashes!

Who said that God's word which you proclaimed had been disproved or altered? God pronounced the judgement of overthrowing and destruction on the sinful Nineveh and not on the penitent Nineveh.

The sinful Nineveh was worthy of death according to God's justice, because "the wages of sin is death ". But the sinful Nineveh is now no more, that the Lord should punish it by destruction. It was actually overthrown when it was reformed to its new condition. The new Nineveh bears no relation whatsoever to the sinful Nineveh which has indeed died and its image vanished from before people's eyes. The new Nineveh is a new creation, born of the Holy Spirit, a pure and unblemished creation, having a new nature and a new spirit, and having new attributes'. It is unjust to pass the sentence of death on this new creation. Therefore sparing Nineveh was one of God's righteous acts, and not only one of His merciful acts.

If Nineveh had continued in its wickedness and evil ways and God allowed it to subsist in this condition without executing His judgement on it, then it may be said that the word of warning had been disproved and was not carried out.

Jonah, however, did not apprehend this logic and considered the literal meaning of the judgement and not its spirit! That was why he became angry and it was not right for him to become angry.

One of the amazing matters was that, after his prayer in which he blamed God, grumbling at what had happened, Jonah was still hoping that God might return and destroy the city, to honor His prophet and gratify his angry heart! Thus the Holy Bible says that Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, *"till he*

might see what would become of the city" (Jon. 4:5).

God saw that Jonah was miserable and angry, Hence He wanted to do him an act of love. While Jonah was thinking of himself, God was thinking of people's salvation. God did not think of His own honor as Jonah did. He did not think of how Jonah had disobeyed Him and grumbled at His judgement, but He thought of how to comfort Jonah and save him from his misery. How wondrous God's love is!

Indeed God had a great work which He needed to do for Jonah. He was seeking Jonah's salvation also, lest when he had preached to others, he himself should become disqualified before God *(1Cor.9:27).* This person who preached repentance to people, needed himself to repent also. He needed to rid himself of his obduracy, pride and self-esteem. As is always God's way, **He began the reconciliation. When He saw Jonah miserable He prepared a plant and made it come up over him, that it might be shade for his head** *"to deliver him from his misery" (Jon. 4:6).*

Many a time do You labor for us, O Lord! You labor for our comfort, for correcting us and for reconciling us. We thought that You rested since the seventh day, but You are still working for our sake. You rested from creating the world but concerning its care, You are still working.

You wanted to deliver Jonah from his misery, but it was he who incurred misery upon himself by his wrong attitude.

Yes. This is true, but I want to deliver him from the two things together, from his misery and from his wrong attitude. He is My son no matter what. **I shall uproot obduracy from his heart by the merciful deeds which I shall work with him, so that he may**

perceive and learn. Just as I had compassion on Nineveh I shall have compassion on him, because compassion is My nature. I had compassion on him when he was cast into the sea; I had compassion on him when he was in the belly of the great fish. I had compassion on him in all his lapses and sensitivities, and I shall have compassion on him now in his misery. I have prepared for him a plant that it might be shade for his head because I know that he will greatly rejoice over it. I seek his joy no matter how much he grumbles at My judgement and no matter how much he becomes angry with My deeds.

It happened as God willed, and *"Jonah was very grateful for the plant" (Jon. 4:6).* Believe me, when I read of the great joy which Jonah had over the plant, I was stunned. It is indeed an embarrassing phrase!

Do you rejoice greatly, Jonah, over the plant which gave shade to your head and did not even hardly rejoice, but rather became angry, at God's mercy which overshadowed one hundred and twenty thousand persons? Would it not have been more appropriate that you should rejoice thus over the salvation of Nineveh?

You rejoiced over the plant because you thought of your own personal comfort, of your self, and not of the kingdom of God on earth. And it pleased God to gladden you after your own heart to show you that He cares for you and deals with you not according to your deeds but according to the abundance of His loving kindness. God descends to your materialistic level to raise you up to the spiritual level befitting a prophet. He deals with you with such compassion while you are sinful to sow in your heart compassion for sinners. Thus He cures your obduracy and unmercifulness towards the Ninevites.

The plant which God prepared for Jonah had two aims: The first was to show compassion on Jonah and give him shade for his head. The second was to teach him a beneficial spiritual lesson for his life. By the growth of the plant God did a merciful deed for Jonah and by its withering God gave him guidance and teaching so that he might benefit bodily, mentally and spiritually.

In Nineveh, Jonah by his preaching was working with God in spreading His kingdom. And outside Nineveh, God was working for Jonah to save his soul and deliver him from his misery.

God continued to work, quietly and in silence, without Jonah noticing. When Jonah rejoiced over the plant it was for its shade and not for the lesson it gave, because he had not yet received it. He rejoiced over the plant and not because of God who was working for his sake from behind the plant.

When God's design started to bear fruit, He prepared a worm and it damaged the plant. The role of the plant ended and remained for God to use it as an element for teaching!

The plant was gone and the shade was gone, and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint and wished death for himself. All these happened according to God's plan in order to give Jonah a useful lesson for his salvation.

Indeed God disposes everything for good, the shade for good and the sun's beating for good as well. The body may grow faint yet this may be for good, that the spirit may become refreshed. Jonah might grow miserable and his soul troubled and he wished death for himself, and this affliction and trouble could be part of God's design, good for saving his spirit and cleansing his heart.

God desires our salvation and is ready to use any useful means even if it sometimes involves trouble for the body or the soul. **Throughout all these spiritual designs Jonah was immersed in his materialistic thoughts; he rejoiced over the plant and became angry when he lost it, without thinking of his own salvation and without caring for reconciliation to God.**

When Jonah grew faint from the sun's beat, he wished death for himself, and said *"It is better for me to die than to live... (Jon. 4:8).* That was the second time he wished death for himself.

The first was when he was vexed because of his dignity and the disproof of his word, and the second was when he became angry because of the sun's beat and the dying of the plant. The first was due to a personal reason and the second was due to a physical reason, there was no part for the spirit in the matter.

Many persons desired death for sacred spiritual reasons, but Jonah desired death for worldly reasons springing from grumbling and lack of long-suffering.

Saint Paul did not err when he said: *"..having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23).* Simeon the elder did not err when he said: *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29 & 30).*

As for Jonah, he did err when he said to God: *"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live!" (Jon. 4:3).* **He said that while grumbling and at a time when he was not ready to die. If God had answered his prayer at that time and taken his life from him, Jonah would have perished.** Is it not of God's mercy that He sometimes does not answer our

prayers if we ignorantly pray for our hurt? The Apostle rightly says: "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss" (James 4:3).* When Jonah reached the stage of praying for his death, God started to talk the matter over with him. He said to him: *"Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jon. 4:4)* Are you angry because of God's wisdom and mercy?

Jonah replied: *"It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" (Jon. 4:9)* I lost my word and my dignity, and now You have deprived me of the shade of the plant, and You do not expect me to be angry that?

Although that manner of speech on Jonah's part was not nice from the spiritual point of view, yet it indicates his honesty with God and his revealing of his true inner depths.

God began to reason with Jonah and convince him. He said to him: *"You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand person?" (Jon. 4:10&11).*

As for your word, or rather My word, which you thought had fallen to the ground, know for certain that it has not fallen nor have I changed. For with God *"there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).*

I did not set out to destroy the people of Nineveh, but to destroy the wickedness in them. I sentenced them to be destroyed when they were mingled with wickedness and had become one entity with the wickedness. But having been separated from wickedness there is no reason in destroying them because there is no wickedness in them deserving ruin.

They have joined My side and become with Me against evil.



CHAPTER SIX: GOD IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

In the Book of Jonah, which is full of life and teaching, we have contemplated on the life of Jonah the Prophet himself, his concern for his dignity, his esteem to his word, and the astounding lapses he fell into owing to that feigned dignity. We talked also of how the gentile mariners were better than him and how better still were the irrational creatures which obeyed God. We also talked about the Ninevites, and their contrition and true repentance.

However, the deepest reflection in this Book is the reflection on God Himself. It is indeed a beautiful contemplation: God in the Book of Jonah. The primary thing which attracts our attention in this beautiful story is God's searching for man.

1. God Searches For Man

In this Book we see that God is the one who searches for man and not vice versa. The life of repentance teaches us that man should return to God, as did the Prodigal Son when he returned to his father. He addressed himself, saying: *"I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18).* **But in the Book of Jonah we find that God is the One who searches for man in order to bring him to repentance. We see Him searching for all. He goes about seeking the souls that are His.**

He searches for the souls of those in the ship in order to save them. He searches for the lost souls of the people of Nineveh in order to

make them repent to save them. He also uses every possible means in order to save Jonah the Prophet. If man does not go to Him, He goes to man in order to reform him and reconcile him. As Saint James of Serug said on the occasion of Christ's Birth, "There was a dissension between God and man, and when man did not go to God to be reconciled, God came down to reconcile man to Him".

God does not see this action of searching for man and seeking his love as contrary to His honor. The Creator of heaven and earth finds His pleasure in seeking the dust and ashes! This gives us an idea of the loving kindness of paternity and of the forgiveness of the tolerant heart.

In searching for man, God used many different means among which some were frightening, reproaching, convincing, showing kindness, and punishment. The most important thing to Him is to reach man's heart and find Himself a place there. God's pleasure is man's love. He wants to rest in man's heart.

We also notice that God does not leave man to his absolute freedom, not to the extent of disregarding him, caring not for his destiny. He does not say to man: "If you come, all right, and if you do not come, as you like!" No, rather, He says: "if you do not come to Me, I will seek you, run after you, search for you and hold you, and I will keep on doing so until I restore you." God's head wishes to rest in the fatigued heart of man in order to give him rest and turn his fatigue into comfort.

We notice in the Book of Jonah that God's searching for man was serious and not ostensible nor a formality. The search persisted until love was restored even if it meant striking man so that he may recover and return to his love.

2. It Is Possible to Use Punishment

The compassionate God may use punishment and frightening if these are useful for man's salvation. In the Book of Jonah we find three examples:

(a) An example of giving a warning and a long respite. This is what happened with the Ninevites, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon. 3:4),* a warning given with a long respite. And the city was not overthrown because it feared the coming wrath and the expected punishment, and they repented.

(b) A more severe example is what happened with the mariners of the ship and the ship's passengers including Jonah.

Here the matter was not just giving a warning, but it was carrying it out for a limited time. God gave orders to the winds to strike the ship so that it was about to be broken. But we notice that God put limits to the wind's blows: "Strike the ship from without, but your water shall not enter it. Strike the ship, shake it, but do not harm any of its passengers." We notice here that the blows caused some losses because the mariners were obliged to throw some of their wares into the sea in order to lighten the weight of the ship.

(c) The punishment within serious danger. The order was given to the great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah looked and found himself inside the belly of the whale.

These are the three ways of punishing, and God wants you to reach Him by any means that suit you or are convenient for you.

If need be, God may raise tempests against the ship of your life,

forcing you to throw some of the worldly matters outside the ship. The ship of your life may be overloaded with self-righteousness, or overloaded with stubbornness, or the love of the world and when the waves blow against it, it shakes.

Lighten your ships, brethren. Most probably God sanctioned that the ship be stricken so that we may throw out of it the bags of self-righteousness, the case of pleasures, and the basket of obstinacy. Throw out all that hinders you, and keep nothing in your hearts but the love of God.

If this way does not work with you, God may send you a whale to swallow you, and you cry out to God, saying: **"O Lord, I cannot endure the whale nor the tempests. The least of things can lead me to You. May your hand be upon me, Your hand and not Your rod".**

People differ in the extent of their sensitivity and in the extent of their response to the voice of God. Some yearn and respond by a mere faraway signal from God. Some remember their sins and repent when they encounter the least affliction or tribulation and return to God before the matter worsens. Another kind of person does not return except by severity and hard blows.

Do not force God to use the severe ways to bring you back.

If God uses the severe way with you, know for certain that it is to meet the severity within you, the severity of your hardheartedness and your non response to God's compassion.

With the Ninevites who feared, God did not use severity. With the mariners whose hearts changed merely by the winds, God did not permit that their ship be destroyed. But with Jonah who was

extremely severe, those small touches were not suitable for him. The waves were striking the ship and the ship was about to sink, and the wares were being cast out into the sea, and amidst all this Jonah "had lain down and was fast asleep". This kind of person does not benefit from the light type of punishment. When someone is in a light sleep you can just pat them on the shoulder or touch the face and they wake up. But the one who is fast asleep needs a strong shaking to wake them.

I fear that your hearts may be of this heavy kind. God wants to make you reach Him. May you respond to His easy, soft, and kind ways and do not compel Him to use severity.

Some of you may wonder how can the severe ways be compatible with God's gentleness and meekness? The answer is simple. God is concerned about your eternal life, much more than your life on earth. For your salvation, He is prepared to do any Divine act no matter how severe in order to restore you to Him. **We notice that God's severity is mixed with mercy and compassion because it is but a mere means.** When He sent the winds and the waves to the ship, He did not sanction the hurt of any of the passengers. When He sent a whale to swallow Jonah, He did not permit the whale to harm him. He sometimes strikes but within the person's endurance and until the aim of the blow is attained.

There now remains one question: **What is the way that suits you which God may use for your salvation?**

Be honest with yourself and with God. If you do not respond except after a severe blow, then say to Him: "Strike, O Lord, as may please You and show no pity. The most important thing is that I reach You". If trials and tribulations are what bring you near to God, say thus to Him: "I confess to You, O Lord, that if I live at ease, I will forget You

and leave You. And if I am beset by afflictions, I restore my relation with You. It is enough that You sanction for me a troublesome superior or a problem at home or an illness so that You may find me at Your feet and find my heart with You."

Be honest, my brother, with God and accept all his dispositions with joy and with thanksgiving. But be careful that God's ways should not lead you to aversion.

For example a person may be sent a useful tribulation from God for their salvation but they use it for their perdition. God sends them a whale to swallow them. Instead of praying in the belly of the whale as Jonah did, they grumble and become restless and blaspheme. We see many who are always complaining of God: Why did God do this to me? Why does He persecute me and why does He neglect me?

Wretched are such persons. God's rod with which He wants to guide them, they use instead as a means of grumbling. They meet God's care for them by complaint. Weak is their faith in God's work with them.

Whatever the situation, God is not annoyed at our reasoning with Him.

Now we remember Nineveh's fasting and consider it the fasting of repentance. May we repent by any means; whether by the Ninevites' means or the passengers of the ship, or Jonah's. May we supplicate God and say to Him: "Your hard work for us, O Lord, all these years will be wasted if it is lost without being beneficial. Continue Your work with us. You suffered trouble in our creation, in caring for us, and in redeeming us. So may our salvation not be lost for the sake of this repentance.. We want there to be Joy in heaven over our repentance. We do not want to thwart the heaven's

rejoicing.

We have now taken two lessons about God's dealings. The first was that He Himself searches for man. And the second was that He is prepared to use severity and punishment for man's salvation. What is the third lesson? We also learn from this Book that God is prepared to relent from His warnings.

3. God Is Prepared to Relent

God is prepared to relent if man returns from his wrong ways.

God does not insist on every letter uttered from His mouth as if to say: "I have said a word and it must be carried out no matter what!" No. God is not like this. How easily does the Holy Bible say that the Lord returned from His hot displeasure: *"the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Ex. 32:14).* And in the story of the people of Nineveh the Holy Bible repeats the same verse: *"God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it" (Jon. 3:10).*

The very thing which Jonah considered as below his level, and found it to be against His reverence and dignity, God humbled Himself and performed it. Jonah was vexed and became angry even to death because he had said a word and it was not carried out. And God, the owner of that word, was not displeased like Jonah, but He rejoiced for Nineveh's repentance and salvation.

God is the easiest Person to negotiate with. One tear is enough to dissolve all His threats and punishments, if these tears are true and from the depth of the heart. To feel remorseful and repent, to confess and ask for the absolution is enough for God to forgive all sins.

To deal with God is easy. Many people ask the question: "Can this sin be forgiven by God? Can He forget that I did so and so?" The answer is yes! Repentance with confession and partaking of the Eucharist forgives all sins and erases all iniquities and a person "becomes whiter than snow" *(Ps.51:7) & (Is. 1:18).* The yoke of God the compassionate is easy as He Himself says: *"My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).*

He is prepared to relent from His warnings and abandon His threats, contrary to man who is adamant, hard, and highly esteems his word.

King Herod, because he had said a word, could not as a king revert it, although he had said it at a time of intoxication and inattentiveness even if his word forced him to behead the Great John! But God, the King of kings, although He had said a righteous word yet He did not disdain to avert it so long as it brought about its effect, as the people's repentance was rightly worthy of that.

It was a lesson God wanted to teach Jonah but Jonah was refusing to benefit from it. Jonah wanted one word; if he said the city will perish it should unquestionably perish.

The fourth lesson which we learn from the Book of Jonah is God's long-suffering and endurance.

God's Long suffering

No doubt God is long-suffering in winning sinners. He does not despair from anyone no matter how deep his wickedness is.

He did not despond of Nineveh the corrupted wicked atheist city which could not discern between its right and its left. He did not despond of Jonah, the severe, hardhearted person who resisted

God's will, adamant to his word, so unconcerned about the salvation of more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons but his word should not fall to the ground.

God did not despond of the mariners who used to worship many gods.

God is enduring in winning sinners, and sees that he who does not repent today may repent tomorrow, and he who does not repent now may repent later.

Jonah refuses to go to Nineveh and takes a ship and flees. But God is patient with Jonah: "I will be patient with you, Jonah, until you go in the end. If you do not go to Nineveh this time you will surely go to it a next time even if you flee from Me. I will continue to pursue you until you return. If you enter into a ship I will enter with you and encompass you all around. If you go down into the sea, I will go with you. If enter into the belly of a whale, I will enter with you. My eyes will be on you everywhere until you return. Do not think that the world can succeed in making you flee from Me, nor that your obstinacy can keep Me away from you nor can keep you away from Me.

Indeed, how beautiful is the saying of David the Prophet: *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? And where can I flee from Your presence?" (Ps. 139:7).*

Man is very harsh in his dealings. We sometimes become easily angry with our friends and from the least behavior cut our relation with them, forgetting the former love between us. We become intolerant quickly and cannot endure. One action from people makes us unjustly judge their whole life and not change our minds. **But God is not so. He does not forsake His beloved quickly no matter how much they err.**

If one of us were asked by God to give an opinion on Jonah, he would probably have said: "Why do you keep Jonah, Lord, when he is like that? You have tried him and found him disobedient, esteeming his word. Use another person. Do You not have someone else? Undoubtedly You have many. You are able to raise up children to Abraham from stones *(Matt. 3:9).* Leave this Jonah who disobeyed You and who could not even obey You like the worm which obeyed when You ordered it to smite the plant. The worm was better than him! But he stood against Your order. Did he want to impose his own will on You? What is the meaning of his persistence that You should kill more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who repented and returned to You? Do not look at such a person. There are many who are more obedient than him, and more submissive and faithful to You than him."

But God endures Jonah the disobedient and the obstinate.

He endures him until He reforms him, convinces him and makes him understand the right way, raises him as a great prophet and makes him a symbol of His death and resurrection, and names a holy Book after his name, and designates for him an everlasting commemoration in His Church, and antiphons and hymns to venerate him. This is God's work with His children.

Blessed be His name.

God's long-suffering is also manifested in the respite of forty days which He gave to Nineveh. He did not take them by their wickedness abruptly but He gave them a chance to repent. Another lesson we take from the Book of Jonah is that God is for all.

God For All People

One of God's beautiful attributes is that He takes all sorts of people and appoints for them portions in His kingdom.

In the Holy Bible we find different kinds of mentality and spirituality. The kingdom of God is likened to a net let down in the sea gathering all sorts. God called Jonah the obstinate who held to his word. He also called a doubtful man like Thomas and a rash person like Peter. He called a gentle and patient person like Moses, and a fiery person like Elijah. He called Abraham who used to fear and say that Sarah was his sister, and made him the father of all believers. These are different kinds of people whom God takes and works in them with His Grace and His Holy Spirit.

It is as if these types of people are a log of wood taken by the "Son of the carpenter" who works with them. He takes part of this beam of wood by the planer, part of it by the saw, and part by hammer. Thus He keeps sawing, cleaning, and cutting it, making a pattern from it and nailing it until it becomes a nice chair for Him to rest in. Or as though we are a piece of clay handled by the Great Potter, who molds it until it becomes a vessel for honor. He is God whose Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters and continued to work until He changed the earth which was desolate, void, and covered in darkness into this beautiful nature of whose beauty poets and writers sing.

This is what God did with Jonah, with the people of Nineveh and with the mariners. He worked in them all until He altered them into holy temples for His Spirit and granted them purity and sanctity that the excellence of power may be of God and not of us *(2 Cor. 4:7)* and even if anybody glories let him glory in the Lord *(2 Cor. 10:17)* and so that no one desponds of his salvation or of others' salvation. He is God who brings sweet out of the strong *(Judg. 14:14).*

Therefore let no one say: "My nature is bad, and even worse than the earth which was desolate, void and covered in darkness. I have tried myself and found that I cannot change, and the father confessors, spiritual guides, and teachers have become weary of trying to reform me. It appears that I will remain in the darkness that was before creation, because the voice of God has been echoing in my ears for the last twenty years saying, 'Let there be light', and I am still in darkness".

No, my brother. Do not despond. He who worked in Jonah is able to work in you also. He who worked in the Ninevites and the mariners is capable of working in you also. He who changes the mud into a vessel for honor is also able to change you in some way.

Be patient and wait on the Lord. But this does not mean that you lax and slacken and remain in the mud until the Potter comes.

Repentance needs two things: Work from God and response from man, as the mariners responded to God's call and believed and made vows, and as the Ninevites responded and repented returning from their evil ways, and as Jonah responded at the end.

Another lesson we take from the Book of Jonah is that God, despite His infinite greatness, likes to reason with man.

God Likes Reasoning with humans

Nearly the whole of chapter four of the Book of Jonah is centered on this sole fact: that God likes to reason with His children; discuss with them, explain to them and reach with them a conclusion, convincing them and satisfying their hearts in the discussion.

It is true that in the Book of Jonah God gave us examples of punishments and warnings, yet there are also examples of reasoning.

God's love for reasoning is clear throughout the Holy Bible:**...***"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord" (Is. 1:18).* The story of the burning of Sodom gives us a clear picture of how God reasoned with Abraham *(Gen. 19).* Also the Lord reasoned with Moses the Prophet and carried out for him his own opinion *(Ex. 32).*

The Holy Bible gives us a marvelous picture of how God reasons with man. God does not intend every time He reasons with us to convince us with something He imposes on us, but He may condescend to our opinion and agree with us as He did when He reasoned with Moses and relented from the evil which He said He would do, and did not do it. **God reasoned with Jonah, and it was He who began.** He said to Jonah, "Come Jonah! Let us reason together and do not be angry", "Is it right for you to be angry?", and Jonah replied:

"It is right for me to be angry even to death!" God was not displeased from Jonah's reply, but He began to convince him practically and verbally that Nineveh should have been spared.

God does not use His mightiness in fulfilling His will. He does not use the term 'I said so, so it should be'. This manner is found with man. **And man sometimes is unsure of his honor and wishes to confirm it by forcing his opinion.** It is an inferiority complex in man and is not found in God who is absolute perfection, who sees that He does not decrease when He reasons with man and when it appears to us that He changed His opinion.

Amazingly enough, God in His reasoning with Jonah, did not

look at the great difference between them. He did not say: "Who is this Jonah that I should reason with him? I am the Creator of all and the Lord of all. It does not befit Me to reason with a handful of dust and ashes!" No, He did not say so.

We notice these days that nations reason with each other according to the standard: heads of state with heads of state, kings with kings, prime ministers with prime ministers, ambassadors with ambassadors, consuls with consuls. It can never happen that a head of state would talk with a chairman or a secretary of a governorate. He would say that such a person is not up to the level to negotiate with me. He can negotiate with a person of his standard.

But God did not do that with Jonah. He did not say: "I will not reason with him directly. I can send him an angel or a prophet like him! Or send him another whale to reason with him! But God condescended to reason with Jonah, and reason with him directly with no mediator, and convince him.

Some may ask: What need is there for You to reason with Jonah, O Lord, and convince him? You are the all wise God. Jonah is supposed to believe in Your wisdom and believe that Your disposal is unquestionably right. There is no need to convince him. Your word is enough. If he did not believe in the wisdom of Your judgment he would have greatly erred and is worthy of punishment. Jonah must obey and submit and has no right to dispute or reason with God.

But God is not like this. He is compassionate and kind. He says: "I will go down to Jonah to lift him up to My level. I will reason with him in order to win him. I do not want to lose this dust. I want to win all by satisfaction and not by compulsion. Jonah must enjoy my

tolerance and realize that I do not become intolerant with him no matter how much he goes astray.

The story of God in the Old Testament is a story of reasoning. When He sent prophets and messengers it was but a means of reasoning on His part.

God does not impose His will nor is He a dictator in His dealings. He is an exemplar of reasoning. Even in His dealings with us now He wants to reason with us.

He gave us prayer in order to reason with Him.

If God does not like reasoning, what is then the use of praying to Him, talking and conversing with Him? Is it not true that He not only allowed us to reason with Him but also allowed that we wrestle with Him and persist with Him? Did not Jacob wrestle with Him until morning saying: "I will not leave You...", as though he had power or authority not to let go of Him!

The meekness of God reached the extent of even reasoning with Satan himself!

We notice that this is clear in the story of Job the righteous.

God said to the Devil, "Have you considered My servant Job?"

And Satan answered: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" And Satan takes from God permission to test Job in order to prove his words.

It is the principal of equal opportunity enjoyed by Satan also.

God also reasoned with Satan in the Temptation in the Wilderness. The Lord went on answering him verse for verse and did not rebuke

him except when he became intolerable.

Until now, God wants to reason with us yet we refuse.

Another lesson we learn from the story of Jonah is that all God's dispositions end in success.

All God's Dispositions Are Successful

Everything was dark. All needed repentance and guidance. God started to work with each one and for the sake of all. **And He succeeded in all His dispositions**: with the mariners, with the Ninevites, and with Jonah. He led them all to repentance and to His knowledge. He worked with each of them in the way that suited them. The Book of Jonah is a story of the success of God's work.

This of course assures us.

We trust that God desires and is able to lead us to repentance like all of these. When Jonah depended on himself in disposing for his own problems and when he depended on his mind and his own will he failed completely. But when he resigned to God's hand, God was able to perform a deed by him and it was successful.

May we take from this story a lesson to live the life of surrender and obedience.



Quotes

In the realm of holiness there are many unknown persons, but they are known by name to the Lord.

God is the easiest Person to negotiate with. One tear is enough to dissolve all His threats and punishments, if these tears are true and from the depth of the heart.

Do not despond. He who worked in Jonah is able to work in you also. He who worked in the Ninevites and the mariners is capable of

working in you also. He who changes the mud into a vessel for honor is also able to change you in some way.

(God) says to them: "Go, O wind! Go, O sun! Go, O wave! Go, O worm!... and everything is accomplished, without dispute. All these creatures are faithful messengers. Thus God used the inanimate objects to convince man, and used the irrational creatures to shame the rational.

Indeed tribulation is a school of prayer.