

THE VERY FIRST JESUS' COMMANDMENT IN 2023: TURNING AROUND

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – 22 January 2023



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Turning around

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In the last three consecutive Sunday gospels, Jesus said nothing. Since Christmas Day, we instead found some people around Jesus spoke of their faith, such as the wise men and St John the Baptist. What they notably did was indicating where Jesus was present.

Today, Jesus finally began to speak, and the very first words he said were,

“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is close at hand.”

While we split these words into two, we can find two significant points from Christ:

1) ***Repent!*** and 2) ***the Kingdom of God is near***

Our general understanding of repentance is like acknowledging our faults/sins before God. Some dictionaries define repentance as an act of feeling remorse about one's wrongdoing and expressing sincere regret. Yes, all are correct. But what did Jesus mean by saying '***repent***' in today's gospel? Does he merely request our acknowledgement of sins?

One of the accounts of repentance may be 'returning'. Repentance is about confessing our sins, but it is fundamentally 'going back'. Returning is simply moving back from where we came. At the same time, we can make a return after changing our minds and changing our direction. But, that change should be thorough. For instance, if you drive up to Sunshine Coast on Bruce Highway, and decide to return to Bracken Ridge, you may need to stop at a certain point and change the direction. Or, you may need to make a U-turn. If we fail to make a U-turn, it could be complicated to return. In this sense, repentance is 'changing our direction' thoroughly towards God. Thus, there would be a couple of preconditions for

changing our direction. First, we need to recognise that we are in the wrong way. Second, we need to have the desire to move. If we have no will to change our direction, we may not be able to have a contrite heart.

Next, today's gospel invites us to ponder our goals through repentance. There would be various purposes for repentance. Someone may think of restoring our friendship with Christ, and others may attempt to have pure hearts through repentance. Today's gospel illustrates clearly one of the objectives of repentance: **Sensing the Kingdom of God near us**. Jesus does not specify some methods of seeing the kingdom of God. Still, we can get a hint regarding how to find the Kingdom of God from Jesus' sayings and subsequent actions.

In appealing repentance, he met people who needed 'turning around' from where they had been. Jesus called Peter who had been stuck at fishing. Jesus did not deny Peter's gift of fishing, but he encouraged Peter to 'turn around' from the fishing space to move to the space of discovering the Kingdom of God. Similarly, the other disciples followed Jesus by 'turning around' from where they had been. What we can also discover from Jesus is that Jesus did not stay at verbalising the importance of 'changing direction' but accompanied those who were doing that. Jesus healed all sick people as a way of helping them to turn around from their own space of agony and sickness.

Today's gospel asks us to find where we stand. Are you standing at Joy or peace or happiness? Or are we in sickening experiences or in any comfort zone? And let us ask ourselves if we need to 'turn around' to move towards Jesus' Sacred Heart. Repentance is not a focus on our weakness or fault, nor is it a feeling guilty. Instead, repentance is the confirmation of our will to find God and turn around with Jesus to enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus' very first speaking is for us as we need to turn around to get closer to the Kingdom of God, where we can fully enjoy what we have.

Peace.

Deacon Minje Kim

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/012223.cfm>