

Reading for Weekday in the First Week of Lent

25th February 2026

First reading

Jonah 3:1-10

‘The people of Nineveh turned from their evil way.’

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.’

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 51(50):3-4. 12-13. 18-19. R19b

A broken and humbled heart, you will not spurn, O God.

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your merciful love;

according to your great compassion,

blot out my transgressions.

Wash me completely from my iniquity,

and cleanse me from my sin.

Create a pure heart for me, O God;

renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence;

take not your holy spirit from me.

For in sacrifice you take no delight;

burnt offering from me would not please you.

My sacrifice to God, a broken spirit:

a broken and humbled heart,

you will not spurn, O God.

Gospel Acclamation

Joel 2:12-13

Glory and praise to you, O Christ.

Even now, says the Lord,

return to me with all your heart,

for I am gracious and merciful.

Glory and praise to you, O Christ.

Gospel

Luke 11:29-32

‘No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the Prophet Jonah.’

At that time: When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, ‘This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgement with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.’

Short reflection on the reading for today

The Jonah story has various echoes from elsewhere in Israel’s traditions. The words of the Assyrian king, “Who knows God may relent and forgive, and withhold his blazing wrath?” are drawn from earlier texts like the penitential prayer in Joel 2:14. The inspired author had meditated so long on earlier prophecies that his own preaching and writing became like a tapestry of biblical passages.

The author of this story is deeply frustrated at Israel’s hardness of heart. Why do they, his own people, with such a rich heritage, refuse to reform their ways and respond to God with faith and justice, with prayer and hope? Look, says this writer, the pagans, even the worst of them, the ruthless and hated Assyrians, are more spontaneously good than my own people!

Jonah reveals a sense of the unsuspected kindness of strangers, even of such unlikely candidates for holiness as.... The dots must be filled in by each of us. For instance, let’s think of our worst enemy, the most impossible sinner we know, hopelessly wicked to the marrow of his or her bones. Such was the “Assyrian” in the ears of Jonah’s people. The same resonance today might attach to such words as Communist or Nazi, paedophile or child molester!

The basic message of Jonah is, *there’s always hope!* As long as life lasts we must never lose hope in others or indeed in ourselves. How marvellous that the once pagan city of Nineveh can come to believe in God, proclaim a fast, pray for forgiveness, to become a model of goodness for all the rest of us! Hope can come from unsuspected quarters! Jonah adds that when God saw the repentance of Nineveh, he “repented of the evil he had threatened to do to them.” If God can change his mind, how can we maintain rigid condemnation of others?