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Wednesday of the 1st Week of Lent

Date: Wednesday, March 12, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C
First Reading: Jonah 3:1–10
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3–4, 12–13, 18–19 | **Response:** Psalm 51:19b
Gospel Acclamation: Joel 2:12–13
Gospel Reading: Luke 11:29–32
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

There is something about the city of Nineveh that lingers in the imagination. It was vast, powerful, prosperous—a city convinced of its own permanence. But in today's reading from Jonah, we see a different Nineveh. A humbled Nineveh. A city shaken awake by the words of a reluctant prophet.

Jonah walks its streets, his message short, almost begrudging: *"Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be destroyed."* No elaborate arguments, no persuasive rhetoric. Just a warning. And yet, astonishingly, the people listen. From the king to the commoner, they put on sackcloth, fast, repent. They turn their hearts back to God. And God, in response, turns back to them. He relents. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

This is the rhythm of divine love: not a God eager to condemn, but a God always ready to forgive. Always waiting for us to return. But notice—God doesn't force Nineveh to repent. He doesn't compel them, doesn't threaten them into submission. He simply offers them a choice. A call to conversion. A moment to decide.

And so, the question: what would Nineveh do if Jonah never came? If the warning never reached their ears? Would they have seen their sin for what it was? Or would they have continued on, unaware, until it was too late?

The psalm echoes this urgency: *"A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn."* It is not the proud, not the self-sufficient, not the ones who believe they have everything figured out who draw near to God. It is the brokenhearted. The ones who know their need. The ones willing to kneel.

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And then we arrive at the Gospel. Jesus stands before the crowds—crowds hungry for signs, for wonders, for proof that He is who He says He is. And what does He give them? No dazzling miracle. No display of power. Just Jonah.

"Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation."

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days. Jesus will be in the tomb. Jonah came preaching repentance. Jesus does the same—but not only with words. He Himself is the sign. His very life, His death, His resurrection—this is the sign they seek, though many refuse to see it.

Which brings us to today—because, let's be honest, we are not so different from Nineveh. We too are caught up in the distractions of life, confident that there is always time, always tomorrow. We too can close our ears to the voice that calls us to change. But Lent reminds us: now is the time. Now is the moment.

And today, in a quiet but powerful way, we are given another sign. A reminder from history. On this very day, 403 years ago, the Church declared two men saints—Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier. Two men who, like the Ninevites, encountered God's call to conversion and responded with their whole hearts.

Ignatius, struck down on the battlefield, confined to his bed, reading the life of Christ and the saints—and realizing, with painful clarity, that his ambitions had been too small, his desires too shallow. And so, he surrendered. Gave up his dreams of worldly glory for something greater.

Francis Xavier, a brilliant scholar, successful, respected—and yet, when Ignatius' words reached him, when he was confronted with the question *"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"*—he could not ignore it. He left everything. Became a missionary. Traveled across continents, preaching Christ to those who had never heard His name.

They were not born saints. They were men who were invited to conversion and said yes. And that, perhaps, is the greatest sign of all.

Because today, we stand where they stood. Where the Ninevites stood. Where every soul stands when it hears the whisper of God calling it to something more.

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Zambia today faces its own challenges as it celebrates Youth Day—poverty that crushes dignity, corruption that eats away at hope, divisions that keep people apart. And it is tempting to think that nothing can change. That the problems are too big, too entrenched. But Nineveh reminds us that when people listen—when hearts soften—grace moves. And change is not only possible; it is inevitable.

So, we return to the question: what will we do with this moment? Will we keep waiting, keep postponing our conversion for another day? Or will we recognize, as the Ninevites did, that now is the time to turn back to God?

Perhaps, as we step into the rest of this week, and while we keep Pope Francis in our prayers, we might carry these questions with us:

- What are the signs God is already giving me, calling me to deeper conversion? Am I paying attention?
- Where is my heart still hardened? What part of my life am I resisting giving over to God?
- What small, concrete step can I take this week—one act of humility, one act of mercy, one act of justice—that moves me closer to Christ?

Lent is not about making dramatic, sweeping changes overnight. It is about softening the soil, making space for grace, allowing God's word to sink in. And when we do—when we truly allow ourselves to be moved—then, like Nineveh, like Ignatius, like Francis Xavier, we will see that God's mercy is always greater than we imagined. Always waiting. Always ready.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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