1

Children

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, 'Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.' But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

"How many of you have ever been asked to do something you didn't want to do?" Hands immediately fly into the air as bright voices begin to tell me of those things that torment their young existence: "Make my bed!" "Take a bath!" "Fold washcloths!" "Put on my shoes when I'm in the house and I don't think I need them!" Surprised at the absence of one particular answer, I tease the children with the comment, "I suppose you all enjoy cleaning your rooms?" "OH NO!" comes the unanimous, vehement reply. "No? Well, no one mentioned it. I just thought I'd better check. I didn't enjoy cleaning my room when I was your age either -- in fact, I still don't. But sometimes it's necessary to do things we don't want to do.

The Bible contains many stories of people who were asked to do things they didn't want to do. One of these people was Jonah. Who can tell me something about Jonah?" "He was a man who went out in a boat," comes the initial response. "Why?" I ask. "Because God asked him to talk to some people and he didn't want to." I am impressed by these children's knowledge of the story. "Yes, God asked him to talk to the people of Nineveh. So he decided to run away from God. That's why he was in the boat. But what happened?" "He got swallowed by a whale!" several children exclaim together. "Yes, there was a fierce storm, and Jonah ended up in the ocean where a big fish swallowed him up." At this statement Tashia raises her hand to get my attention. I nod to her. She holds her hands outstretched as far as they will go and says, "It was at least this big!" "Yes," I agree, "it was at least that big!" Then, looking around at the group of inquiring faces I ask, "Can you imagine being swallowed by a fish?" As many little heads shake the answer, Tommy speaks. "No," he says, "I'll bet he didn't like it very much." "Who," I ask innocently, "Jonah or the fish?" "Well, Jonah, of course!" Tommy replies, somewhat impatiently. But it is evident that some young minds have been stretched with the thought that the fish might have had feelings too. "So, what happened to Jonah after he had been in the belly of the fish for three days?" "The fish spit him out!" several children answer in unison. "That's right. The fish spit him out, not into the water, but onto dry land.

While Jonah was in the fish, he had lots of time to think about God and what had happened when he had tried to run away from the task God wanted him to do. When he finally got out of the fish, Jonah knew there was no place on earth where he could run completely away from God. "Jonah also knew, because God had come after him and saved him, that God loved him even though he had disobeyed. So Jonah went to Nineveh and did what God had asked him to do in the first place. "Sometimes our parents or teachers or friends ask us to do things we really don't want to do. We can refuse, disobey, even run away. But eventually, like Jonah, we have to come back and the task is still waiting. Running away is not often the best way to solve a problem. So, the next time you're asked to help out by folding clothes, or making your bed, or even cleaning your whole room, maybe you'll find the task easier if you remember the story of Jonah. God loved Jonah and needed Jonah's help, just as the people asking you to do these things you don't like to do need your help. I'll bet they love you to

Adult

Two readings today deal with fish. I don’t its in preparation of next month being Lent.

Today's Gospel is about Jesus' calling of his first four disciples. It is about the first people who were called to hold the job which we hold today. Mark's story is not very elaborate. It is short and to the point. There is a certain note of adventure as the four men leave their fishing business to go with Jesus, but there is not much in the story that seems terribly upsetting.

What the story doesn't tell about is what those men were getting in for by becoming followers of Jesus. To find out what was really in store for them, we have to keep reading. And what we discover is that being a disciple was not glamorous. In fact, it was downright dangerous.

Later in Mark we hear Jesus say, "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will find it." Matthew includes another comment: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Those are disturbing statements, especially for those of us who are today's disciples.

He was saying that being his disciple is not an easy task. He was saying that the gospel is a disturbing force in the world which can upset individuals and nations alike. It brings change and new experiences to all who hear it. Being his disciple will not be easy because the task of the disciple is to be the bearer of this revolutionary gospel message.

We know what happened to Jesus. His message disturbed those in power and they tried to silence him. Of the four men in this gospel text, three were also executed for their witness. The powers that ruled the ancient world were upset by the gospel, and they tried to silence its voices. I'd like to be able to say that's all ancient history, but there are still governments today which oppose the gospel.

It is important for us to realize that the truth of the gospel is like a two-edged sword: it is both comforting and disturbing. The messengers of this gospel may find themselves similarly regarded by those who don't want to hear that message, even in countries where Christianity is protected by law.

Jesus' two-edged sword also strikes close to home. I wonder what Peter's mother-in-law and wife had to say about his chasing off with an itinerant preacher. I wonder how old man Zebedee felt when his two sons simply picked up and left their half-mended nets in the boat.  I suspect that the family relatives in this story were not too pleased. But that, too, is the nature of the gospel. It can upset individuals and disturb even family relationships. Jesus' call to service can be a call that provokes controversy and difficulty.

Don’t think I had family support when I said I want to be a teacher. I will always remember my future father-in-law said if if was going to get married I would have to have a real job. My family was involved in Serra International a vocation support organization. Yet when I told them I wanted to be a priest, they were not exactly supportive.

I think of a prospective member when I was a who told me: "I would like to join your church, but I have to live with my wife, and she'll have none of that. I guess I'll have to wait a while."I’ve heard similar in military chapels. O even had a teenager who said she would like to come to Church but she can’t get her parents up on Sundays. Jesus points us to the reality that the gospel can be disturbing, both on a world-wide basis and as close as home and family.

Why? The answer lies in the power of the gospel to change people's lives. Once we meet Jesus Christ on the road of our own individual life, we will be changed! We will be different people! I don't know about you, but my nature is such that I tend to resist change.

I suspect that many folks see the gospel through rose-colored glasses -- wanting to see only the joy, comfort, and light --  and not wanting to see the difficult or disruptive. "Behold, I will make all things new," said Jesus. That's the other side of the two-edged sword.

There are two important words in this morning's gospel, one of which is the word repent! **Too many folks think "repent" means to feel sorry for what you've done -- and then, go do it again.** That's not it at all. "Repent" means to change direction. It means a change in priorities. It means living with a whole new approach to life! While I do feel that the church can serve as an anchor in a world where everything else is changing so rapidly, that is only one side of the gospel. The other side calls us to embrace the newness and change which Jesus brings.

The second key word is believe. That doesn't mean listing your denomination as Catholic on some application blank. It means trust and reliance and placing one's whole life in God's hands, regardless of what happens in life. It's called "the leap of faith." That's the kind of change which the gospel produces. That's what makes us different. There's no turning back, because it's a difference that won't go away.

To be sure, we will always experience the power of sin in our daily lives. We may even go as far as renouncing the Christ who brought us to faith. Peter knew about that, for he was the one who denied he ever knew Jesus. But later he went out and wept bitterly. The change was there. He couldn't turn back. He was changed by the power of a gospel that left an indelible mark upon his soul.

Being a disciple is a real blessing, despite the gospel's two edges. We know that God has promised to be with us always. That means that we are never alone in life, no matter how we may feel at a given moment, or how unsettling life's changes may seem to be.  Being a disciple means that God is not just a "Sunday friend," but a "daily companion" in our life. It means that all things "do indeed work together for good." Oh -- it doesn't guarantee that we won't get the flu or have to face unpleasant experiences. It does mean that as God's person, God will take the events of our life and turn them toward the good, even though we may not be able to see that good at the moment.  Being a disciple also means that we will be part of the greatest change of all, the time when God will change this age into the age of eternity. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ stands at the center of our faith, because we know that our mortal nature will be changed into an immortal nature. And we shall be changed -- one final time.

The gospel is a great power. It does shake nations. It does disturb lives. It does change lives. But above all, it gives new life --  both for today and for eternity. However, because the gospel does change people, we sometimes are tempted to hide in its words of comfort rather than embrace the new life to which it calls us.

I recently came across another pastor's sermon title which I found intriguing. I want to leave its thought with you. "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would you be convicted?" We are today's disciples, and it is not an easy task. Thankfully, our Lord gives us the strength to do the job which he has given us. The big question is: "What kind of disciple will we be?"

2

Children

**Object:** Fish stickers, erasers, or tiny toys (If you are a fisherman you might wear a favorite fishing hat.)

Good morning, boys and girls. How many of you children have ever been on a fishing trip? I've done that and it is really fun. Sometimes I let the fish go after I've caught them, 'cause it's the fun of the catch that I enjoy most. Although sometimes if I'm out camping I fry the fish and have a good meal.

There are lots of different kinds of fish one can catch. Can you name any that you have caught? (Responses -- Trout, bass, perch, and so forth.) Sounds like good fish stories to me!

Do you know that there are people who are paid to fish? They do it for a living. They go out in big boats, far out into the oceans, to catch tons of fish. What do we call people who fish for a living? (Response.)

Yes, that's right. We call them fishermen, just the same as those who do it for sport.

Do you know that Jesus was friends with some fishermen? Can anybody name one of them? (Responses -- Andrew, Peter, James, John.) They were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. One day when Jesus met them He said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Wasn't that a strange thing to say? What do you suppose He meant by that? (Response.)

He meant that God is seeking men and women to be his people in a special relationship, and that He was going to use people to help bring others into his kingdom.

Jesus has extended that invitation to us as well. He will use us to be fishers of men. Do you know how we can do that? (Response.)

We tell others what Jesus means to us, and how He loves them and died to forgive their sins, and we win them into God's kingdom.

Wouldn't you like to be that kind of fisherman? Okay, here is a little fish symbol to remind you that you can be one of Jesus' fishermen. (Pass out fish symbols.)

Teens/Adults

**Object:** envelopes

**Teachers:** This project will help your students to recognize their real priorities in life, and to see the ways in which those might change with time. Start off with a discussion. Ask your students to list some of the things that are important in their lives. Why are these things important? Do they think that they should be so important? Should other things be more important? What? Why aren't they more important? Now ask each student to make a personal list of the things most important to her or him. Do not ask your students to share these lists, but pass out envelopes in which the children can seal them. Promise your students that no one else will ever see their lists, but that you will hold them for exactly one year. At the end of that year, return the envelopes to each student. This will give your students an opportunity to reflect on both current and past priorities, as well as the encouragement to consciously shape future ones.

**Parents:** Everyone in your family would profit from this exercise. You can put the envelopes wherever you normally keep your valuable papers, with strict instructions to everyone to leave them alone until next year.

3

A Sunday school teacher was proud of her lesson for the day. She thought she had presented the material quite nicely. Summing up, she asked the class, “And what do we learn from the story of Jonah and the big fish?” “It’s better to fly.”

Most of you know at least part of the story of the prophet Jonah. It is one of the most colorful and memorable stories in the Hebrew Bible. Jonah, of course, was the man who got swallowed by a big fish.

The gospel and the first reading both focus in on being called.In view of the Gospel we have today, however, I wonder if the problem for all of us is that faith, even that worn on our sleeves, does not go nearly as deep as it should go, that what Jesus is talking about, what drew his initial followers, was something far more profound than our modern attitudes of faith. What Tebow does is a bit of a variation on what Catholics did years ago, when they would make a sign of the cross before shoot for a basket or getting up to bat. Faith is what makes my life better. Faith is God on my side.

Jesus, however, presents a faith that goes way beyond our own conveniences and benefits. Notice how Mark frames it: Jesus sees the arrest of John the Baptist, and then begins his ministry. Jesus’ whole ministry lies under the shadow of persecution and death. Jesus knows what the stakes are. But, given this perspective, what do we see Jesus inviting people to do? He invites them to conversion. We too are invited to conversion and action. Just was we celebrated Martin Luther King Day, we were not to take a day off but offer a day of service.

God came to a man named Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh, a wicked city, and “cry against it.” But Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh. It would not be wrong to say that Jonah hated the people of Nineveh. Jonah felt about the Ninevites like some people do about, say, Muslims or illegal immigrants. Bible scholar William Neil, in the *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, (p. 294) describes Jonah as “a man who is the embodiment of intolerance, bigotry and lack of human sympathy.”

Do you know anyone like Jonah? Is there any ofJonah in you?

Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh, so he went in the opposite direction. He boarded a ship bound for Tarshish, which was as far from Nineveh as you could go in the ancient world. His idea was that, as the Scripture puts it, he would escape “the presence of the Lord.” What a bright idea. He would go somewhere where God was not.

What Jonah did not understand was that Jehovah is a universal God from whom there is no escape. It’s like some people who act in a certain way when they are in church but act entirely different when they are in the office as if God could see them in church, but not in the workplace. It’s also like that verse, Numbers 32:23, that says “your sin will find you out.” We think our misdeeds are hidden, that we are safe. We couldn’t be more mistaken.

There is a story that comes from the days of the great British sailing ships. The British warship Sparrow suspected another vessel, the Nancy, of carrying illegal contraband. And so the Sparrow stopped the Nancy off the coast of Haiti. An examination of the Nancy’s papers and cargo yielded only circumstantial evidence of wrongdoing. Still this was enough for the captain of the Sparrow to seize the ship and to tow it into Kingston, Jamaica. There the captain and crew were charged with transporting illegal cargo.

Meanwhile, a British frigate, The Abergavenny, happened to be cruising in the same waters. The officer in charge of this ship noticed a school of sharks feeding on the carcass of a young bull. The officer ordered his ship to pull up alongside the dead animal. The sailors succeeded in hooking one of the sharks.

Hauling the shark aboard, they opened it up and discovered in its stomach a bundle of papers. Examination showed that these papers belonged to the seized ship, the Nancy. The captain set sail for Kingston. His boat arrived in port not long after the case of the Nancy came up for trial. Thomas

Briggs, the captain of the Nancy, his crew, and even the Nancy’s lawyers, were sure the case against the Nancy would be thrown out of court for lack of evidence. Imagine their surprise when they were suddenly confronted with the condemning papers which they had thrown overboard papers which had been recovered from the belly of a shark. Instead of being acquitted, they were convicted. (2)

“Be sure your sin will find you out.” You can’t hide from God and you can’t hide anything from God.

You have heard sermons before from the book of Jonah on the futility of running from God. Yet we all do it at some time in our lives. We don’t have to board a ship and head for a distant port. We do it with our minds and hearts. We simply tune out. We ignore the voice that calls us to God’s service.

There is no place that God isn’t, but Jonah still tried to flee, just as we do. But what happened? The ship that he was on encountered a vicious storm, and was tossed about on the waves like a toy. The wind and the waves were so fierce that seasoned sailors begged to their gods for mercy. Finally these sailors cast lots in order to determine with whom the gods were angry. The lot, of course, fell upon Jonah. “What is it that you have done,” the sailors asked him, “that this evil has come upon us?” Jonah confessed that he had displeased his God by seeking to flee from His presence.

“What shall we do with you?” the sailors asked, for the storm was growing ever more fierce.

“Throw me overboard,” Jonah declared, “then the sea will calm down.” The sailors were in no mood to quibble, so they threw him over the side of the ship into the raging sea. And the Bible tells us that the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of that fish for three days and three nights.

I believe it was Dwight L. Moody who said that it was perfectly easy for a great fish to swallow Jonah whole. After all, said Moody, Jonah is only one of the minor prophets.

I do have to tell you that there is another story of more recent vintage of a man being swallowed by a fish. His name was James Bartley, another British seaman who was whale hunting on the ship Star Of the East in February 1891. Bartley fell overboard and was swallowed, like Jonah, by a whale. Allegedly Bartley lived in the whale’s stomach for 2 days. He survived, but we’re told his skin was bleached white from the experience. He lived to tell his tale until 1926. (3)

We have no record that Jonah was beached white by his experience. But it is interesting to note that Jesus once referred to the story of Jonah. He told the skeptics that the only sign that they would receive would be the sign of Jonah. Christ would emerge from the ground on the third day after his crucifixion just as Jonah had emerged on the third day from the belly of the fish.

Now we all know the story up to this point. The big fish can no longer  
stomach Jonah after three days and coughs him up on dry land alive and well, and probably well chastened.

At this point the Lord came to Jonah a second time and told him again to go

preach to Nineveh. This time Jonah was in no mood to argue. So he went to Nineveh and preached “Forty days,” he cried, “and the Lord will destroy this city. Forty days is all you have to repent.” And something amazing occurred. “The people of Nineveh believed God.” They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth all of them, from the greatest to the least. Even the king of Nineveh repented. He dressed in sackcloth and issued a decree of total surrender to the will of God.

That’s impressive. Anytime you can get a politician to repent, you’ve accomplished something. Jonah’s revival was an astounding success. Every sinner had repented. Every heart was changed. You would think that a preacher would rejoice in such a great victory being given to him. But not Jonah.

Here are three of the most fascinating sentences in all the Bible:  
“But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger & abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity”

Can you believe that? Jonah was upset that God had changed his mind about destroying Nineveh he literally wanted to die.

Then Jonah went out on a hill overlooking the city to see what would happen to Nineveh to see if God would acknowledge his displeasure. And God had a little fun with His cantankerous prophet. He made a plant grow up  
near Jonah to shade him while he sat and pouted. And the plant pleasedJonah immensely. It’s one thing to have a temper tantrum. It’s another thing to sit all day in the hot sun. If he was going to sit there until he died, at least he would do it in comfort. But when dawn came the next morning, the Lord sent a worm to attack the plant so that it withered and died. Then God sent a hot east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so hard that he fainted. The weather made Jonah so uncomfortable and so angry that he again asked God to let him die. But then God spoke to Jonah. He asked him if he was angry over the plant dying. Jonah answered that of course he was.

And then God taught Jonah a lesson. In two of the most important verses in the Bible, God said toJonah, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people

who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” And this is how the little book  
of Jonah ends.

What a magnificent story. The lessons, of course, should be obvious. The first one we’ve already noted. There’s no place you can flee from God’s presence. That’s the first lesson. There’s nowhere that God is not, if I might be allowed a double negative. God is a universal God.

And here is the second lesson: God’s love is a universal love.. In fact, you can make a case that God loves diversity. God created a rainbow of different people and that’s the way he prefers it!

I was reading recently about bananas. You may wonder what this has to do with diversity. After all, aren’t all bananas the same color at least when they are ripe? Well, yes, but this may be the problem.

Did you know that bananas may be on the way out. They may soon go the way of the dodo and the dinosaur. One report suggests that, if we are not on our guard, bananas may disappear in less than ten years.

Here’s the problem. The vast majority of banana trees, regardless of location, are virtual carbon copies of one another. The modern banana lacks genetic diversity. Therefore, any parasite or disease that strikes one banana tree has the potential to wipe out the world’s entire supply. The fruit is threatened by its uniformity.

Writer Mark Tabb makes this comment: “The banana crisis shouldn’t surprise us. Uniformity always makes a species weaker. The more alike plants or people may be, the more at risk they actually are. This is especially true of the human race. Most of us feel threatened by those who aren’t like us. Whether the pigmentation in their skin is different or their ideas run counter to our own or their outlook on life is just plain strange, diversity makes us uncomfortable. Variety may be the spice of life, but most people prefer their life bland. Those strange people with their strange ways of doing things perplex us. And worse.” (4)

And yet God created diversity. There is a reason. Different people have different gifts. Especially in an economy such as ours, we need a steady influx of people with energy, ambition and different ways of thinking. It may irritate us that the clerk in the store barely speaks English, but diversity has been

America’s secret strength, particularly over the past century. NINA

And Jonah stalked to his shaded seat and waited for God to come around to his way of thinking.” “And God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs to come around to [God’s] way of loving.”

But God’s grace is sufficient for all. This is the truth of the New Testament: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We are all dependent on God’s grace.

I think that it is absolutely ironic that the best-known hymn of Christendom, at least English-speaking Christendom, was written by a former slave trader. Don’t tell me God doesn’t have a sense of irony! Who is more demonic than a slave trader? Taking innocent human beings from one part of the world, snatching them from their families, stuffing them down into the cargo holds of ships, chained, many of them dying en route, then selling them into bondage in a distant land. Yet Christ touched John Newton’s heart and subsequently Newton wrote, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

We don’t know if the scales ever fell off Jonah’s eyes like they fell off John Newton’s eyes. The Bible doesn’t tell us. He did learn that he could not flee from God’s presence. And he learned that God loves everybody: Jews and Gentiles, Iraqis and Russians, the people of Nineveh and the people of Israel. We all belong to one great family, and Christ died for everyone’s sins. I hope that, as Jonah thought about his past attitudes, he came to realize that God’s grace was sufficient for him as well.

1. *Daily Grace Devotional* (Colorado Springs, Co: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), p. 192.

2. Adapted from Donald & Vesta Mansell “Sure as the Dawn,” copyright (c) 1993 via http://www.witandwisdom.org. See also http://www.weymouthlunarsociety.org.uk/other\_ships.htm.

3. *More Super Trivia* by Fred L. Worth, Greenwich House, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1981, p. 25.

4. Mark A. Tabb, *Greater Than Unconventional Thoughts on the Infinite God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), pp. 149-150.

4 Father Joseph Pellegrino  
Today’s reading point us to consider God’s call and the exigency, the necessary immediacy of our response. They begin with the journey of Jonah through  
Nineveh. According to the reading, Nineveh was a very large city. It would take three days to walk from one end to the other. But the Ninevites didn’t need to hear Jonah’s prophecy for three days. After a single days walk, or as soon as they heard it, they repented. In the Gospel, Jesus call Simon and Andrew, and then James and John, and they leave their boats and follow him immediately. The strongest message of demanding an immediate response, though, flows from the second reading from  
Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*:

*I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.  
From now on, let those having wives act as not having them,*

*those weeping as not weeping,  
those rejoicing as not rejoicing,  
those buying as not owning,  
those using the world as not using it fully.  
For the world in its present form is passing away.*

It is very clear that we must make the best use of the time that the Lord gives us. This is a stunning contrast to the attitude of so many who set aside an hour a week for the Lord feeling that somehow or other they have kept God happy in a mere 60 minutes. God does not need our prayers for an hour a week. We do not pray to keep God happy. We pray to keep ourselves happy, and we pray for others to be happy. We need to pray, and we need to pray continually.

We have to make the best use of our time. Our time is not our own. It belongs to God. At the beginning of the *Book of Genesis*, we hear that all creation was entrusted to mankind. When we think of creation, we focus on the concrete aspects of creation, those things which we can see such as the lakes and oceans, the mountains and hills, and we focus on the plants and animals God has given us to care for,, and we focus on human beings and how we can care for others through the proper use of God’s gifts of creation. There is another aspect of creation we often miss. That is time. Time is also part of creation. Time only exists in the physical world. It is entrusted to us to be used wisely.

We have to set aside time for many different activities--for sleeping, for working, for exercising and, especially, for praying. In fact, we should all have a schedule for prayer in our daily lives, a schedule that we keep. It is important also that we set aside time for relaxing. Some of us live in a state of continual stress. We need to fight off stress usually through physical activity. Either we take care of stress or stress takes care of us--and everyone around us. We have to set aside time for others, sometimes that means caring for others, but usually we simply need to be with others.

Sadly, we often waste time. We get tied up in going from one You-Tube video to another, or from one TV program to another. After a while, we look at our watches and

ask, “Where did the time go?” My great fear is that God looks at me and says, “Is that the best you can do with your day?” We have a responsibility to use whatever time we have left well.

Many older people often ask, “Why am I still here?” The answer is that God has more work for us to do, more ways to use the time he gave us. The last week of August, 1988, I came to St. Ignatius to say goodbye to my mentor, Fr. John LaTondress. He was dying of cancer. He said to me, “This is not fun, you know.” He wanted it to end, but he knew that God still had a bit more work for him to do here on earth, even if that work was simply to offer up his suffering for another week or so.

Fr. John received the blessing of knowing that his time on earth was coming to a rapid conclusion. We do not all have that blessing. Most of us do not know when our days on earth are coming to an end. We can live another 50 years, or just another 50 days. That is why we have to live our lives in a way that we are always ready to give an account for how well we use the time the Lord has given us.

To all this we have to add that when the Lord gives us a particular call, a particular mission, He calls us to address this Grace immediately. There is an exigency to His call. When we put off responding to this grace, then the unheeded call can very well dissipate and an opportunity to further the Kingdom of God will be lost. How often have others asked us a serious question at and inconvenient time. Children and Teens seem to be excellent at finding the worst times to ask a question or make a statement that needs an immediate response. Just as Mom is parking at the supermarket, her 9 year old says, “Billy’s parents are separating. Are you and Dad going to do that  
too?” Mom might want to put off the answer and the discussion but then the right time to respond never comes. How often I have said, “ This person is seriously ill. I must see him; I must see her,” but then I put my visit off only to learn that it is no longer possible for me to visit.

*The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness thereof*, we pray in Psalm 24. This world belongs to God. He has set us in this world to do his work, but He only gives us a brief time to accomplish His tasks. We pray today that we make the best use of the time He gives us.