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Monday's Gospel: Jesus, the only Path to Salvation

Gospel for Monday in the 16th
Week of Ordinary Time, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 12:38-42*)

Then some of the scribes and
Pharisees said to Jesus, “Teacher, we
wish to see a sign from you.”

But he answered them, “An evil and
adulterous generation seeks for a
sign; but no sign shall be given to it
except the sign of the prophet Jonah.
For as Jonah was three days and
three nights in the belly of the whale,

so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

Commentary

Our Lord knows that this request by the scribes and Pharisees is insincere and lacking in good faith. They want to test Jesus, and are probably willing to attribute to Beelzebul (as they had just done: cf. *Mt* 12:24) any miracle

that he might work. So Jesus firmly rejects their request.

He then refers to the “sign of the prophet Jonah.” Jonah’s three days and nights in the belly of the whale are a sign of the time between our Lord’s death and resurrection. This interpretation is also supported by the parallel sign of the temple being rebuilt in three days. When people from the same group had asked him: “What sign do you have to show us for doing this,” Jesus replied: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (*Jn 2:17-22*).

But there are other clear points of comparison with Jonah, and Jesus was probably referring to them as well. More broadly, Jonah’s entire mission is a sign: his voluntary sacrifice of his life to save his companions, his miraculous escape from death, and the marvelous success of his preaching in Nineveh.

All of this has its parallel in our Lord's redemptive death, his resurrection and the subsequent success of the Gospel.

The scribes and Pharisees, educated in the Scriptures, could also recognize the warning in our Lord's words: "behold, something greater than Jonah is here." They had refused to accept Jesus' message. But the Ninevites had repented when confronted with Jonah's warning: "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." So if the scribes and Pharisees continued to reject Jesus, they too would face disaster, and he seems to imply that it will happen to this generation.

For us, the entire passage is an exhortation to open our heart and accept our Lord's teachings, for they are the true and only path to salvation

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