

Outside of Christianity, most of the religions in the world begin with man searching for God. But Christianity is different. Christianity begins with God as He searches for man. The Christian faith starts with God.

This is what happens in today's first reading. Ninevah was a vast city, we are told it took three days to go through it. Most likely it was built with a series of small public squares or plazas. It was these plazas that Jonah would have gone to, preaching to the people to repent of their sinful ways and warning them of the coming destruction if they failed to do so.

Archaeology and social anthropology have taught us that ancient people led lives remarkably similar to our own. Their lives were very busy and full of noise. They had many pleasures and distractions and even their own form of celebrities who enjoyed public popularity and achieved great things. But like our own culture of today, these pursuits led them away from God into lives empty of meaning and devoid of lasting happiness.

That is what happens when we move away from God's plans and the moral law he built into human nature. We become lost in the darkness.

But God is moved with pity for the sinful. He searches us out. To Ninevah He sent a prophet, Jonah, to wake them up, to put them back on the path of God's plan for human happiness. That is the only plan that will truly work. Through Jonah, God went in search of the Ninevites because His great love for mankind moves Him to care about their happiness.

The same thing happens in today's Gospel. There is much more going on than Jesus calling together His first four disciples. Jesus is doing what He came to earth to do, to call every person into a deep, meaningful, personal relationship with God.

That is really what the core of Christianity is all about.

Notice how Jesus calls His first apostles by name, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. John's Gospel tells us Jesus had met them before, but now He calls them to follow Him more closely. He calls them because He wants to give them more meaning, purpose, and ultimately, happiness. He wants to bring them to His Kingdom.

That is what the God of Christianity, the one true God, is all about. God comes in search of every human heart. He calls each one of personally into an everlasting friendship with Him.

Some of you may be familiar with a tradition among some of the communities of our separated brothers and sisters. It is called an Altar Call. At an Altar Call the minister invites anyone to come forward who wants the community to pray over them.

One baptist minister shared his vision of what he would like to see at an Altar Call. He begins by asking who would like to come forward and meet Jesus? As people begin to make their way forward he stops them. "What are you doing?" he asks. "Go out and meet Jesus!"

The people then turn around go out to their cars and leave. Then he looks at the rest of the congregation gathered there. "What are you doing sitting there? Go out and meet Jesus." And with that the rest of his flock gets up, goes out to their cars, and leaves the church parking lot.

A little while later the minister begins to get phone calls. The first is from the local prison. "There are a bunch of nuts here pounding on the gates of the prison saying they want to meet Jesus. I tried to tell them that all we have here are thieves, rapists, and murderers but they insist they want to come inside and meet Jesus."

Then he gets a call from the hospital. “There are all these crazy people here trying to get into the hospital saying they want to meet Jesus. I tried to tell them we only have sick and injured people here but they insist on coming in to meet Jesus.

Then the minister gets a call from the senior living community. “There are all these loony people over here pounding on the door saying they want to meet Jesus. I tried to tell them that all we have here are old people waiting to die. But they won't go away. They say they want to come in and meet Jesus.”

God calls us to Him in many ways. He calls us to meet Him in prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes. He also calls us to meet him right here in the liturgy, in the Mass.

The word “liturgy” means a work of the people. Our liturgy is our public prayer, It is the time we come together as a Christian people to meet God in His true presence. And at the end we are sent out to evangelize the world, seeing Jesus in everyone we meet.

It seems as if every day we see the world slipping further and further away from God, further into the darkness that Christ came to save us from. The way we bring the world back is through a beautiful, reverent worship of God in the liturgy.

When we do this, when we get the liturgy right, according to the rules God has set out for us, then everything else will fall into place. A beautiful, reverential liturgy will attract people to us, the pews will be overflowing, musicians will stand in line to offer their gifts in His service, our young people will organize themselves into a youth group on their own, that will serve as an example to the world.

It was not too long ago that our parish was in danger of closing. Attendance at the school was at an all time low and whatever affects the school, affects the parish as well. If the school were to shut down, the parish would not be far behind. Plans were being made to absorb what remained of our community into one of the neighboring parishes.

But then a new pastor was assigned who recognized the life saving value of the liturgy. Together with lay ministers who shared that vision we worked to bring the liturgy back into line with the rubrics of the Church. Changes to the school quickly followed. We were blessed with the Dominican sisters who helped to reform the religious education at our school. School attendance began to rise, and new, young families came in, attracted to the revived school and liturgy.

The school is now nearly at capacity and the parish is no longer in danger of being shut down. All this was achieved through a renewed focus on the liturgy.

I will tell you what I tell our students at every opportunity I get. The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish is a very special, very blessed parish. And you don't need to take my word for it, just ask any of our sisters. Ask any of the visitors who come to us from all over the country. Ask any of the families who pass half a dozen other parishes on their way here.

We are bringing the world back to God right here in this parish, and we start with a beautiful Mass.

Here at Presentation Parish we have made great progress in celebrating a beautiful, faithful Mass according to the rubrics of the Church. It is not uncommon for visitors to stop me after Mass and tell me what a beautiful service we have here. But to continue this work we need your help. We need people who will sacrifice their time and talents to serve God as lay ministers in His Church.

We need you to serve as Extra-ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, to assist in distributing the Eucharist to the faithful.

We need you to serve as Readers to proclaim the Word of God and lead the community in offering the prayers of the faithful.

We need you to serve as Ushers and be the face of our community, greeting visitors and helping them to feel welcomed and loved.

God is always calling out to each one of us, because he loves us and wants to lead us to a more fulfilling life, both here on earth and also for all eternity in Heaven. So please, take some time to listen to how God is calling you. When we receive communion we are at our closest to God, take that time in the pew during communion and listen to how God is calling you. If he is calling you to serve as a lay minister than please, talk to the ministers you will find in the vestibule after Mass or call the office to learn more.

Our liturgy is a time when God comes to His people, bringing light to a darkened world. It is through the liturgy that we can affect true lasting change in the world. Ask God how He wants you to be a part of this change and then in humble faith, listen to His answer.