

Remember, Jonah swallowed by a whale, fleeing an assignment given to him by God. Certainly, Jonah wouldn't make that mistake a second time. But lo and behold the second assignment sends him off to evangelize the nasty and godless Assyrians. Because Israel is God's chosen people, a good many of them have cultivated an intolerant nationalism, which limits God's mercy to only their nation. It is impossible, in their thinking, that nations as wicked as Assyria, in which the city of Nineveh lie, should escape God's wrath. But their king self-imposes ashes and humbly calls on his people to repent in hopes that God will extend mercy. To everyone's surprise, the people of Nineveh are turned from their former ways. Jonah, however, struggles to accept this wicked people's transformation and wants God to strike them down. Instead they are shown mercy, and nothing seems to be going poor Jonah way. It is a parable of mercy, friends, showing that God's disciplines are but an expression of the merciful will which moves all people to repent and seek forgiveness.

Jesus references himself in terms of the Sign of Jonah. The Sign of Jonah in this context represents preaching to the need for repentance by a prophet who comes from afar. But Jesus is a much greater sign than any preaching of Jonah. Mathew's similar account in chapter 12, versus 38-42 points out how Jonah endured three days and three nights in the belly of a whale. Friends, this message communicated by Jesus is really a prefigurement of his death and resurrection.

Signs and sacraments point and guide into something deeper and more profound. Jesus is that center and the very sacrament of God! While the Church is the sign and sacrament of Jesus! It befalls us, the Christian Baptized to become most convincingly, the sacrament of Jesus. We do this only by embracing ongoing transformation and repentance. A turning away from and discarding of anything in our lives not representative of Our Lord! From such a new vantage point we are gently oriented in ways to show the world God's tender mercy.

Amen