

Getting out of a rut is really no more difficult than getting into one. Many people devote lifetimes to getting into a rut. I'm not talking about simple routines or habits we form that help us face the rigors of life. But ruts we slip into--overindulging ourselves with sex, money, food, or drugs, or just being inattentive to people we love. We slip into ruts that make us feel comfortable and others feel annoyed.

Getting out of a rut takes some effort, but getting into one does too. As they say, it takes a long time to lose weight because it takes a long time to gain weight.

We all have habits we'd like to change but often something is in the way. People who suffer from any addiction will tell you the time isn't right, other circumstances make it impossible to change, they've tried before and nothing works, or that the addiction isn't really a problem. In this way we rationalize that the problem isn't really our own, it's only a problem for people who say it's a problem.

This may seem like a bad time to talk about changing habits, especially if you have some you ought to change. New year's has come and gone--it's too late for more resolutions. Lent is still six weeks away--it's too early for penance. A friend of mine asked me earlier this month if I'd made any New Year's resolutions. I said no, I usually make resolutions during Lent. He said, "What's wrong? Can't you keep them up for a full year?"

In any event, no one suggests we make resolutions now. No one, that is, except Jesus in the Gospel. "Reform your lives," he says, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These words are the first ones Jesus speaks at the beginning of his public ministry. "Reform your lives" is the theme of his preaching.

If you had to whittle down the Gospels to one message, this would be a sentence to remember: Reform your lives, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Notice Jesus does not say, "Reform your lives, and good luck." He says the kingdom is at hand as if to say, you're not doing this alone. God is already here. A light has come to people dwelling in darkness. There is help for you.

People who slip into habits they want to change need to sit down and honestly ask why is this so hard? Have you tried every means of help available? Have you tried them lately? If so, and if the troubles are still there, can you find peace in the cross Christ shares with you?

Often instead of reforming our lives we find it much easier to blame someone else, to get lazy, or to deny the problem. Today's Gospel urges us to look one more time. We climb into our ruts with the help of our desires. We climb out of them by redirecting our desires. Isaiah says on those who dwell in the land of darkness a light has shone. That same light shines in the dark ruts of our lives, urging us out into the kingdom of heaven.