

Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

In last Sunday's first reading, Isaiah prophesied Jesus as "a light to the nations." Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus as light continues today. In the first reading Isaiah prophesies, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." This prophecy is repeated in today's Gospel, "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen." The Psalm of today affirms Isaiah's prophecy in the following words, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Further affirmation of Jesus as light will be on February 2nd, the celebration of Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Real darkness is not absence of light. Real darkness is life without Jesus Christ. As I mentioned last Sunday, the result of life without Jesus Christ is dark hearts, dark life, dark attitudes, dark plans, dark policies, dark politics, dark relationships, dark homes, dark neighborhoods, dark communities, dark establishments and institutions, dark leadership, and so on. As followers of Jesus Christ and bearers of his light, we are to keep his light burning and shining, and do what we can to see that darkness does not consume our world. Jesus challenges us in Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." St. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:5, "You are children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

In the second reading, we see that the Christian Corinthians were torn apart by divisions and rivalries. They were in different opposing camps: Paul's camp, Apollos's camp, Cephas' camp, and Christ's camp. The divisions and rivalries we see in many places, including among Christians, are evidence of life without light of Christ.

It is unfortunate and sad that some Christians who are supposed to be bearers of the light of Christ and instruments of reconciliation and peace are, rather, Evil One's weapons and agents for darkness, divisions and rivalries. Jesus commands us in the Gospel to repent from these sinful acts. Jesus warns us about the consequence of divisions and rivalries in Matthew 12:25, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no town or house divided against itself will stand."

Also, in today's Gospel reading, the first four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen: Peter and his brother Andrew; and James and John, sons of Zebedee. Why didn't Jesus call his disciples, at least the first ones, from scholars of the Scripture or from learned men or from men of reputable professions or from the influential political class of his time? Rather, he called fishermen who were among the nobodies at that time. Jesus wants to teach us something: The call to discipleship is not determined by high class status or paper qualification or influence or affluence. God can call and use anyone; child, adult, rich, poor, learned, unlearned, male, female for his work. No one should say that he or she is not qualified. No one should underrate another person. Our God is God of surprises.

It is also symbolic that fishermen were the first to be called to discipleship by Jesus. There are a lot to learn from fishermen. Traditional professional fishing is a painstaking job only embraced by strong and hardworking people. Fishermen cast their nets and wait patiently. They persevere by casting their nets over and over again. At the end of their fishing they spend time to sort out good fish from trash picked up by the nets. Fishermen are courageous people. While many people are resting and sleeping at night, fishermen are in the waters fishing, many times under very bad weather conditions. They are not deterred by darkness, storms, tide and dangerous water creatures. They take many risks. Serious fishermen fish in faraway deep waters. We need to have qualities of good fishermen to be good and effective disciples of Jesus.

To summarize, the readings of today remind us of our responsibilities as followers of Jesus Christ:

- We are bearers of Christ's light.
- We are instruments of reconciliation and peace.
- We are not to underrate ourselves or feel unqualified to be used by God.
- We are not to underestimate anyone or feel that anyone is unqualified to be used by God.
- For effective discipleship, we need commitment, patience, perseverance, and courage.

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