

## **Synopsis: OT III [A] Sunday (Jan 22) Homily on Mt 4:12-23**

**Introduction:** Describing the humble beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, today's Scripture readings teach us that Christ has brought us from darkness of sin into the Light (4:16) by calling us to repentance (4:17) and the acceptance of God's rule.

**Scripture lessons:** The first reading contains the prophetic reference to Christ as the Light that dispels darkness. Matthew wanted his readers to recognize that the Light Isaiah spoke of had finally appeared with the coming of Jesus.

The second reading advises the Corinthians to live as children of the Light, avoiding divisions and rivalries, because several factions had arisen among the Corinthian Christians, each claiming allegiance to its first Christian teacher or to a particular Apostle.

In today's Gospel passage (Mt 4:12-23), Matthew explains that what had been prophesied by Isaiah had been fulfilled through the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus. By his ministry of inviting people to the Kingdom of God through repentance, Jesus brought Light to peoples living in darkness, thus fulfilling God's original promise. In addition, the Gospel describes the call of the first disciples (4:18-22), and Jesus' own teaching and healing ministry, inviting people to repent of their sins and accept the Good News of God's rule (Kingdom of God), which he was preaching. Ordinary fishermen with no formal training in Mosaic Law were chosen to preach the Good News. They were to be very effective instruments in the hands of Jesus to continue His mission

**Life message:** 1) We need to appreciate our call to be Christ's disciples: Every one of us is called by God, both individually and collectively. The call is both a privilege and responsibility. The mission of preaching, teaching and healing which Jesus began in Galilee is now the responsibility of the Church and of each individual Christian. Our response to the call begins with our Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation. That response is strengthened through the years by the Eucharist and Reconciliation and is made manifest in Matrimony or Holy Orders. We are healed and consoled in the Anointing which also prepares us for death. As we respond to Christ's call we gain spiritual strength through our

personal and family prayers, our Sacramental life and our faithful study of the Bible and Church's teachings.

2) We need to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom: When we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are sent forth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to defend the Catholic faith. Each Christian has received a unique call to preach the Good News of God's love, mercy, forgiveness and salvation through his or her daily life. This call challenges us to rebuild our lives, homes and communities in the justice and peace that Jesus proclaims. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us ask the Lord Jesus to give us the strength and perseverance to answer his calling, so that we may faithfully serve the Lord, doing his Divine will as best as we can by cooperating with his grace.

**OT III [A] (Jan 22/2017): Is 8:23--9:3; I Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4:12-23**

Anecdote: 1: Light and darkness: Terry Anderson, a journalist for the Associated Press, was seized and held hostage in Lebanon for seven years; blindfolded almost all of that time, Anderson described his experience in this way, "Deepest darkness, fumbings, uncertainties are frightening. More frightening is the darkness of the mind, when outside light makes no impression and inner lights go dim. . ." [Den of Lions, Crown Publishers, Inc. (New York: 1993).] In November of 1965, a power failure plunged seven northeastern U.S. states and Ontario, Canada, into a darkness which lasted for more than thirteen hours. About thirty million people living in eighty thousand square miles of territory were affected. In 1977, another, less severe, power failure darkened New York City for fifty-two minutes. Losses due to accidents and looting were in excess of one billion dollars. In the Holy Scriptures, light and darkness serve as symbols for good and evil. In today's first reading and in the Gospel, Jesus is presented as the One sent to remove the darkness of sin from the world. Through Isaiah, God promises that His people will see an end to the darkness of oppression and separation. Today's Gospel shows us how the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Jesus.

2: Remain in politics and exert a Christian influence there: Those of you who saw the remarkable film *Amazing Grace* remember the story of William Wilberforce. Wilberforce was a British politician who, after his conversion to Christianity, became England's greatest anti-slavery advocate. It was through his tireless efforts

that England eventually outlawed slavery, paving the way for the end of the slave-trade in the Western world. But William Wilberforce almost missed his calling. After his conversion, Wilberforce considered leaving politics for the ministry. He wasn't sure how a Christian could live out his faith in "the world." Fortunately, Wilberforce turned to a man named John Newton for guidance. Newton, of course, was the author of the much-loved hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton was a former slave trader who had renounced the trade after his conversion. Newton convinced Wilberforce that God had called him to remain in politics to exert a Christian influence there. It was John Newton who gave William Wilberforce the wake-up call that kept him championing the cause of freedom for Britain's slaves. Four men, fishermen by trade, were toiling at the nets beside the Sea of Galilee when they received a wake-up call from Jesus. And their whole world was turned upside down.

3: Delivery Room suspense: Three men were pacing nervously outside the delivery room at a hospital when the head nurse came out beaming. To the first she said, "Congratulations, sir, you are the father of twins." "Terrific!" said the man, "I just signed a contract with the Minnesota Twins and this'll be great press." To the second man the nurse said, "Congratulations to you too. You are the father of healthy triplets!" "Fantastic!" he said. "I'm the vice-president of 3-M Company. This'll be great P.R.!" At that point the third man turned ashen and ran for the door. "What's wrong, sir? Where are you going?" called the nurse. As he jumped into his car, the man shouted, "I'm dashing to my office to resign. I'm the president of 7-UP!" (Msgr. Dennis Clarke). John the Baptist and Jesus surprised the self-righteous Jews by their call to repentance. Today's Gospel, from the fourth chapter of Matthew, offers us Christians an equally surprising and shocking announcement by Jesus: "Repent; the Kingdom of God is near."

Introduction: Today's Scripture readings tell us that Christ has brought us into the Light (4:16), by calling us to repentance (4:17).

The first reading contains the prophetic reference to Christ as the Light that dispels darkness. Matthew wanted his readers to recognize that the Light Isaiah spoke of had finally appeared with the coming of Jesus.

The second reading advises the Corinthians to live as children of the Light, avoiding divisions and rivalries, because several factions had arisen among the Corinthians, each claiming allegiance to its first Christian teacher or to a particular Apostle.

Today's Gospel reading (Mt. 4:12-23) makes us realize that what had been prophesied by Isaiah was fulfilled through Jesus. In his ministry of calling the disciples and reforming lives, Jesus also brought Light to peoples in darkness, restoring and fulfilling God's original promise. In addition, the Gospel describes the call of the first disciples (4:18-22) and Jesus' teaching and healing ministry, inviting people to repent of their sins and accept the Good News of God's rule which he preached. Thus, the Gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

First Reading (Is 8: 23- 9:3): At the time of Isaiah the prophet, Israel was split into a northern kingdom called Israel, with the city of Samaria as its capital, and a southern kingdom known as Judah with Jerusalem as its capital. The people in the region around Galilee were overcome by gloom when their enemy, Assyria, conquered them and began among them the process of enculturation and paganization. The Assyrians forced intermarriage in the northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. The descendants of these intermarriages became the despised Samaritans of Jesus' day. But Isaiah declares that God's power is greater than the powers of darkness and assures them that "a great light" will lead them into "abundant joy." Jesus is "the great light" who leads us all out of the land of gloom. By His death and Resurrection, He has assured us that darkness can never have the last word. In his prophetic mind, Isaiah sees this as if it has already happened: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great Light..." The Light he is talking about is the Light of God, which scatters the darkness of ignorance and sin. No wonder Matthew quoted this very passage from the great prophet when he described the time Jesus went to the area around the Sea of Galilee and "began to preach"! Matthew wanted his readers to recognize that the Light Isaiah spoke of had finally appeared with the coming of Jesus. Although the Judean Jews considered the Samaritan women unclean from the womb and their men godless blasphemers, Jesus came to them as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, bringing them light and salvation.

Second Reading (I Cor 1: 10-13, 17): Since Corinth was a wild and woolly place, Saint Paul needed to wield his authority there quite severely. Throughout this letter, he was very concerned with preserving the unity of the Christian community. Several factions had arisen among his Corinthians, each claiming allegiance to its first Christian teacher or to a particular Apostle. Paul wanted the Christians to rise above these immature rivalries and to follow the humility and obedience of Jesus Who had emptied Himself for them all. Paul argued that people who live in the Light must avoid divisions and rivalries. Christ cannot be divided, nor can His message be changed to suit its hearers. So Paul urged his readers to heal all divisions in their community so they would bear united witness to the Lord. They needed to keep their focus on Jesus Christ.

Exegesis: The center of Jesus' public life. After John was arrested, Jesus chose Galilee as the base for his teaching, preaching and healing mission. That choice fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (9:1-2). Nazareth and Capernaum of Galilee were in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali. It would seem that Jesus' trip to Capernaum was made, not just as a missionary trip, but to establish Capernaum as his home base. Capernaum by the sea was a small agricultural and fishing village of Galilee on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was a small region with a large, mixed Jewish and Gentile population. Major trade routes passed through it. Hence, the Galileans were more open than the residents of Judea to new ideas. In addition, the western shore of the sea was occupied by many small but prosperous cities and towns. This provided Jesus with the chance to minister to many people within a reasonable walking distance.

Light in darkness: Matthew tells us that the people to whom Jesus brought his ministry had been sitting in darkness, but that Jesus' coming had brought them a great Light. The area was called the "Galilee of the Gentiles" because there was a large population of Hellenistic pagans mixed in with the Jews who had only recently begun to resettle a land devastated by earlier wars. As a Jew in Roman-controlled territory, Jesus had located Himself among the marginalized, with the poor not the wealthy, with the rural peasants not the urban elite, with the ruled not the rulers, with the powerless and exploited not the powerful and with those who resisted Imperial demands rather than with those who enforced them. Thus, He established His ministry among the apparently small and insignificant places and people who, nevertheless, were central for God's purposes. We, too, need to

introduce Christ's Light into the darkness of prejudice, war, abuse, social injustice, hunger, poverty, ignorance, greed, anger, vengeance and apathy.

Invitation to repentance: Jesus used exactly the same words John the Baptist had used: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." "To repent" means that we make a complete change of direction in our lives. Jesus knew what repentance, or change of direction, meant, because he had just made a big change in his own life. Repentance, properly understood, is an "I can't" experience rather than an "I can" experience. If repentance is promising God, "I can do better," then we are trying to keep ourselves in control of our lives. When we come before God confessing, "I can't do better," then we are dying to self. We are giving up control of our lives. We are throwing our sinful lives on the mercy of God. We are inviting God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves -- namely to raise the dead -- to change and recreate us. "Repent" is in the present tense -- "Keep on repenting!" "Continually be repentant!" Repentance is the ongoing lifestyle of the people in the kingdom.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the theme of Jesus' preaching. Matthew consistently uses the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" instead of "Kingdom of God." The terms are synonymous. Many Jews in those days preferred the use of "Kingdom of Heaven," because of scruples about using God's Name. We probably shouldn't interpret the "Kingdom of Heaven" as a place -- such as the place we go when we die -- but rather as God's ruling power that emanates from Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is the place where God rules. What should be our response to the coming of Heaven's rule? Surprisingly, it is not worship or praise, but repentance. Perhaps this is the big problem with the coming of the Kingdom or the coming of Jesus at Christmas or on Palm Sunday -- we want to celebrate and praise, rather than repent. In telling us that the Kingdom has come near, Jesus is telling us that we can dwell in this Kingdom, provided we repent or turn away from the idols that crowd our lives in order to let God reign in our lives.

The call of the Apostles: Matthew's account of this call is very brief. Jesus called two pairs of brothers Andrew and Peter, and Zebedee's sons, James and John, whom he had apparently never seen before. He invited them to become his disciples, and they responded immediately, leaving their nets, their boats, and their father to follow Jesus. Usually rabbinical students sought out their teachers and

attached themselves to them. However, Jesus, as rabbi, took the initiative and called what were probably less-than-ideal candidates to be his students. The disciples were simple working people with no great background. In Cicero's ranking of occupations (De Off 1.150-51), owners of cultivated land appear first and fishermen last. What Jesus needed, then, were ordinary folk who would give Him themselves. What Christ needs today is not our ability, but our availability. What Jesus taught His disciples was not a course of study, but a way of life to follow. Hence, He offered these men the opportunity to observe him from close at hand on a daily basis. Given the relatively small size of Lower Galilee and close proximity of the Galilean places named in the Gospel, there is no need to assume that those who followed Jesus never returned home again.

Fishers of men: In the ancient world, fishing was a metaphor for two distinct activities: judgment and teaching. Fishing for people meant bringing them to justice by dragging them out of their hiding places and setting them before the judge. Fishing as teaching people meant leading them from ignorance to wisdom. Both cases involved a radical change of environment, a break with a former way of life and an entrance upon a new way of life. We are the fish dragged out of the water in the nets to die so that God may give us a resurrection, a new life, a new family, a new future, all under God's control, all within the Kingdom of Heaven which has come near in Jesus. We have very little control over our own lives, but as fish caught in the net of God's love, we can trust that we are under God's control. We have to believe that being captured by God's love, being commanded by Him to repent, die to self and obey Him, and being raised to a new life by God, is not only right for us, but is a message we need to share with the entire world.

Jesus' teaching ministry: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." For Matthew, Jesus' teaching was of much greater significance than His miracles. Indeed, His teaching took precedence even over preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus taught in their synagogues. There was only one Temple, located in Jerusalem, but every village of any size had a synagogue where people gathered to worship and to learn. Teaching was at the heart of synagogue life. The service consisted of prayers, readings from the Scriptures, and an address. The ruler of the synagogue could invite any qualified man to give the address. The synagogue, then, was the natural place for Jesus to

begin His teaching ministry. The last two verses (24-25), of this chapter, not included in this lesson, emphasize Jesus' healing ministry and the effect it had on people. Great crowds came from near and far to follow Jesus. The activities of Jesus are summarized in the last verse of our text: teaching, preaching, and healing -- perhaps in simpler terms: words and deeds. Our words and deeds need to be addressed, not just to Church people or to our parishioners, but to all with whom we have contact.

Life message: 1) We need to appreciate our call to be Christ's disciples: Every one of us is called by God, both individually and collectively. The mission of preaching, teaching and healing which Jesus began in Galilee is now the responsibility of the Church. Our own unique vocation and relationship with the risen Lord is never separated from the Body of the universal Church. Be we monk, priest, married or single lay person, male or female, we are all called, and in this call we become what God wants us to be. Our response to the call begins with our Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation. That response is strengthened through the years by the Eucharist and Reconciliation and made manifest in Matrimony or Holy Orders. We are healed and consoled in the Anointing which also prepares us for death. In addition, God is relentless in calling us back to Himself when we stray from Him. Let us make personal efforts, then, to see the Light of Christ and to grow in holiness by learning the truths that are revealed through the Holy Catholic Church and its Sacraments. Let us be shining lights in the world as Christ was and make a personal effort to bring others to the Truth and the Light, so that they may rejoice with us in the mystical Body of Christ, the present, developing form of the Kingdom of God.

2) God sends us to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom: "Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people" (Mt. 4:23). Equally today, the Word of God, the promoting of the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven, heals all kinds of ills. The Word of God transforms hearts so that victims may forgive those who have harmed them, those who have physically abused them, those who have sexually abused them, and those who have psychologically abused them. When we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are sent forth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to defend the Catholic faith. Like Peter, James and John, we are asked by Jesus to take on the

work of discipleship; we are asked to leave our “fishing nets” -- our own needs and wants -- to follow the example of love and servanthood given to us by Jesus; we are asked to rebuild our lives, homes and cities in the justice and peace that Jesus proclaims. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us ask the Lord Jesus to give us the strength and perseverance to answer His calling so that we may faithfully serve the Lord according to His Divine Will.

## **JOKE OF THE WEEK**

Teaching ministry: A pastor told his congregation, "Next week I plan to preach about the sin of lying. To help you understand my sermon, I want you all to read Mark 17." The following Sunday, as he prepared to deliver his sermon, the minister asked for a show of hands. He wanted to know how many had read Mark 17. Every hand went up. The minister smiled and said, "Mark has only 16 chapters. I will now proceed with my sermon on the sin of lying."

Website of the Week

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