

January 22

THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Reading 1 IS 8:23—9:3

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles. Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Responsorial Psalm PS 27:1, 4, 13-14

R. (1a) **The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

R. **The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

One thing I ask of the LORD;
this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD

all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD
and contemplate his temple.

R. **The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;

be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

R. **The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

Reading 2 1COR 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Alleluia MT 4:23

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom
and cured every disease among the people.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel MT 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.* From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him. He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.

Reflection:

THERE ARE THREE DISTINCT PARTS in today's Gospel reading:

- Jesus, the light of the nations and the fulfillment of Hebrew Testament prophecies.
- A call to total conversion, to live in that light
- Early responses to the call.

After the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus moves up north to Galilee. It is his home province. It is where he will begin his public life. At the consecration of every Mass, the priest says: "*Take this all of you and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.*" "Given up" is perhaps a less than ideal translation of the Latin *tradetur* which means "will be handed over" and is the Latin equivalent of the Greek verb *paradidomi*. So, in the Eucharist, the Body of Christ is also "handed over" to us. And we, in turn, collectively as the Body of Christ in the Christian community are expected to continue that handing over of ourselves in the service of the Gospel and the promotion of the Kingdom. Matthew says that Jesus left his home town of Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town in Galilee, which, he tells us, is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee "in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali". This reminds the evangelist of a prophecy from Isaiah which Matthew now sees being fulfilled. At this time Galilee did not seem an obvious choice for the Messiah's mission. It was regarded as a 'remote' province. ("*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" Nathanael asked with some surprise and cynicism.) It was a rebellious region where even Jews were not noted for their observance of the Law. Yet the prophecy suggests that the Light of the World is to be found in Galilee. Galilee, of all places, is to be the light of the nations? Not for nothing do we speak of a "God of surprises"! But it is precisely in thi Jesus, the Messiah, begins his mission. His preaching is summed up in one deceptively simple sentence: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" 'Preaching' would be better translated 'proclaiming', making an announcement of Good News. What is this "good news"? The Greek *eu-angelion*, from which comes the Latin "evangelium", is translated into modern English as "gospel". This is a variant of the earlier 'God- Spel' or 'good news'. And what is this good news? The Good News is that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is near. "Kingdom of Heaven" can be a very misleading term. To many, it may be identified with "heaven", the "place up there" where we hope to go to after death, if we have behaved ourselves.

In fact, it is important to be aware that the term in this context has far less to do with a future life than with our life here in this world. The other gospels speak more directly of the "kingdom of God" which, in fact, is what Matthew also means. However, Matthew's gospel was written for a Christian community consisting primarily of converted Jews. In their tradition, they were very reluctant ever to use the name of God directly and so Matthew throughout his gospel speaks of God in indirect ways. One was is to use the term "heaven" or to use the passive voice of a verb, e.g. "*Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.*" He does not say by whom they are forgiven but God is clearly understood. The way to enter that relationships is, in Jesus' words, to "repent". This is the response to Jesus' call. For 'repent' usually means to be sorry for, to regret some wrong actions we have done in the past. Jesus is asking for much more than that. It is a call, not to wipe out the past, which is really not possible, but for a change of direction from now on into the future. The Greek word, rendered by many translations as 'repent', is *metanoia*. This word implies a radical change in one's thinking; it means looking at life in a completely new way, making what is sometimes called a 'paradigm shift'. This new way of seeing life is spelt out through the whole of the Christian Testament.

And it is a message not just for Catholics or Christians but for people everywhere. The Kingdom goes far beyond the boundaries of the Church and the Kingdom is being realised in many ways in places where Christianity has yet to penetrate. About 80 percent of the world's population does not know the Gospel of Jesus but that does not mean that the values of the Kingdom are absent. We must learn not to see Christianity or Catholicism in sectarian terms -- 'them' and 'us'. The message of Jesus is a vision of life for all and should be communicated as such. In the Second Reading, too, Paul warns against divisions in the Christian family. It seems that the Christians in Corinth were dividing into factions and identifying themselves with various community leaders: "*I am for Paul*", "*I am for Cephas (Peter)*"; even "*I am for Christ*". It is clear that such divisions are harmful. All can only be for one person, the One who suffered, died and rose for them, the One in whose name all of them were baptized - Jesus their Lord. We have, unfortunately, many such divisions among Christians today - "I am a Catholic", "I am an Anglican... a Lutheran... a Methodist... a Presbyterian..." The list is, alas, endless. This is not the kind of family that Jesus intended. Such a dysfunctional family is not in a good position to give effective witness to the Good News of truth and love and fellowship which Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper (John 17).