

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time **Lectionary: 67**

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 [1 Cor 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,

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

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,

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
and curing every disease and illness among the people.

or [Mt 4:12-17](#)

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3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

I have been reflective over the past few weeks as 2016 and the Christmas season has come to a close and the new calendar and liturgical years begin. A few events over these weeks made me ask the question again; “what is really important?” Last week I attend a meeting with a group of health care providers who genuinely seek to live a Catholic moral life in a challenging world. The faithful witness of many was heart-warming. Similarly, we had the opportunity to celebrate Christmas not in our own home for the first time since we had children. Our older daughter hosted the gathering this year for the first time. I was proud of her interest to take on the task, her efforts, and organization with the help of her sister and brother. Then there is the now complete task of packing up our son for his move to the Washington DC for a new job. This will be the first time he will not be living with or close to us in his life and is distressing to his mother and I. Two weeks ago we heard of the Magi, who started on a long trip to find a legend maybe even thinking it would turn out to be another desert mirage. But they persevered in the quest and held on to it even facing some petty and cruel dictator. But the question then and still facing us today is – what is really important, especially in changing and stressful times? Well we are lucky. We are blessed in the gift of faith, so we have the guidance and wisdom of the ages offering us direction. So today we hear more guidance for uncertain times as we start the beginning of the cycle of ordinary time. We have again ample time to contemplate our direction and how we need to build an appropriate relationship with the Father as we live our every-day lives.

In today’s readings, we hear the continuation of the reading from Isaiah. I don’t know if you get the same sense of depth, surety, and comfort from the prophet’s words as I get, but he was the clearest of those foretelling of the coming of the Messiah. Even though he was from a more well-to-do family and had status with the rulers of his time, he always was foretelling of better times and a better future. A time when the promises of the Almighty would be fulfilled and how that would come about. Today we are comforted by his words telling that the promises would be fulfilled not only for the Chosen Peoples, but even for the Gentiles. But he was not the prophet of the “Feel-Good” times of some megachurch, no, there were to be troubling times before the promises were to be fulfilled. Isaiah gives us the comfort inherent in faith. Believing does give us hope and joy. When the Lord is near we do feel calm and secure. The distracting noise in and around us is quieted. And when we are quiet, faith fills our hearts and we just burst at the seams to let it out. Yes we then have the strength to witness to the goodness of the Lord. Yes we have the strength to live lives that glorify the Lord. So today we have been given the realization that true joy comes from the knowledge and faith in the love of our Creator and His promises.

To move forward many years, we again hear that there is joy in the promises of the Christ if we stay true to his teachings. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is trying to set the record straight that we need to stay focused on the teachings of Christ and it is equally important to not be distracted by the charisms of others who not only may preach the same message, but may even do so in the name of Christ. But we need to focus on center and focus of the person of Christ who is the true messenger of the Father. We need to see how heresies no matter what name they go under have splintered the Church over the centuries, all the way to modern times.

Then we hear today’s short Gospel from Matthew. There is the obvious that Jesus needed to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah to emphasize that salvation has come to all peoples not just to the Hebrews. Bu then we are equally mystified possibly by the statement that something new is on the way or is it old? The kingdom of Heaven has come – to this place and this time and now! But then how do we live that idea, that reality, every day? We may want to immediately drill down into what this may mean. Did the Magi? Their simple narrative was “just seek and the rest would work itself out”. In other words, the details would be obvious. In our literate world we are always obsessed by the details and we have many talking heads who slice and dice every word

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A

and nuance of some famous personage or another but especially we need to think and see it their way – only their way. But the whole picture needs to be seen first to understand where we need to go next. We always need to hold the map right or one can get easily confused in all the details and end up going in the wrong direction. So, what is this Kingdom of Heaven we hear about? In the parlance of the time and surviving these many years, The Kingdom of Heaven is the promise of Heaven. However, implicit is a permanent link from this time and space to that time and space in front of the Almighty. There are real consequences to how we live our lives that are linked forever. We were made with two natures that are inseparable – physical body and spiritual soul. The link is permanent. So the kingdom of Heaven being at hand could simply mean salvation has come. But there is more in there. The kingdom of Heaven is attainable and Jesus the Christ went on to tell us how that works, how to live lives that will bring us to this most desired place. Again, we should hear the words of St Paul urging us to stay focused on Jesus and not be distracted by all the other personas and ideas that might grab our attention. Speaking from personal experience, we begin to realize after a while that life is too short for all our desires. We need to prioritize where we want to go so at the end we are prepared for the infinitely desirable prospect of living for eternity with our Creator and his Son and the Spirit. We need to discern what is important to relationship – relationship with the Lord and relationship with those around us. Then we need to discern that the rest in this temporal reality is just a distraction.

After 2000 years just under a third of the population of the earth, only 2 billion of over 6 billion people claim to be Christian and less than a billion claim to be Catholic and only a third and a half actually practice their faith in any meaningful way. What happened? Do we blame the deterioration of society around us? Do we blame the scandals in and around the church? Do we use the excuse we just don't have enough time to think about it? Do we just say it is too hard? Be assured what happened is what has been happening ever since Adam and Eve – every unique person of every time and place is invited to eventually say, "Yes Lord I believe" and to live lives that proclaim our love of God and of our neighbor. This needs to be from the core of our beings, not just from the intellect. The heart and mind cannot easily be taken apart, but they do influence each other. Just as we were encouraged by the readings today, we need to set priorities in our life, especially as we sit at the beginning of the new liturgical season. We need to put the time in our day to contemplate the goodness of God, we need to put the emotions and mind together to understand and say "yes, thank you Lord". When this affirmation takes place, we will find we can set appropriate priorities in our life, we will find we can have enough time for what is truly important, we will find that we have enough faith, and we will find we have enough strength to live lives every day that glorify the Lord. That faith in our hearts needs to be reflected in our actions – every day. Then at the end of our days we will find that the kingdom of Heaven is our new dwelling place for all time thereafter. Amen