

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**Third Sunday in the Ordinary Time**  
**January 22, 2023**

**Lectionary Readings:**

**Isaiah 8:23-9:3**

**1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

**Matthew 4:12-23**

**God's light will shine in places of darkness.**

**Christians are called to perfect unity.**

**Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee.**

**Matthew:**

John the Baptizer has been removed from the scene, but the kingdom of God must not be neutralized; another prophet takes up the cause: Jesus of Nazareth. Having heard the preaching of John and having received the baptism of John, Jesus is now ready to assume his position on the side of God's purposes. He launches his own career as preacher and prophet; he gathers disciples to himself; he challenges the powers of evil in a healing ministry. He goes straight into the midst of darkness and sin: into Galilee.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus does not shy away from confronting the powers of evil in a very direct way. (See the comment below under "Isaiah.") Matthew makes liberal use of "fulfillment citations." He quotes from the Jewish Scriptures to show his Jewish and Gentile Christian audience that Jesus brings the Law to its completion in his life and in his ministry. God's long-standing plan for humanity is now being brought to fullness of realization.

*Call to repentance:* How little we know what the true meaning of repentance has to be! We feel some bits of shame and a few stirrings of guilt, so we go to confession and "make a new beginning." And go right on living as we have before! That is not repentance. That is not the *metanoia* of which the Scriptures speak. "A complete about-face; an entirely new way of being and of living; a dramatic turnaround; going in a direction truly opposite from the previous direction of our lives; a 180-degree turn." *Conversion* can only be illustrated by the response of the disciples whom Jesus calls: they *leave everything* and follow him. Repentance means *to put on Jesus Christ* -- to become like him in all things. The encounter with Jesus Christ cannot be casual or offhand. It has to be a profound, gut-wrenching transformation of our total lives.

Matthew then proclaims that after having selected disciples who would accompany him as he pursues his ministry, Jesus goes about *all Galilee* teaching and preaching. We will hear in John's Gospel that Jesus is the *Word made flesh* for our salvation. That *Word* comes to expression not only in the ontological reality that is Jesus himself but also to existential reality in the preaching and teaching that he performs. The reign of God happens as Jesus speaks of it. It happens again when we who are disciples proclaim that word also in our preaching and teaching.

It is not by accident that Matthew follows up with an account of the *healing ministry* of Jesus. It is not that Matthew had nothing else to say at this point! The *healing of every disease and every infirmity among people* confirms the preaching and teaching of Jesus. The eradication of evil (uprooting of evil in its causes and in its effects) is immediately manifested in the healing of diseases (bringing to right the disorder that sin had introduced into the world) and healing infirmities of people (empowering those who had been disempowered by the rebellion of the human race). The reign of God is not just promised; it is truly inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. It becomes actual,

then and there.

We live in an era when the kingdom of God is still seeking fulfillment, actualization, application to the lives of people. The Church must do what Jesus did.

### **Isaiah:**

The “Land of Zebulun and the Land of Naphtali” will later be called Galilee, a region to the west of the Sea of Tiberius (Sea of Galilee), the northern source of the Jordan River. A district with a mixture of racial elements from very early times, it had never been completely “illuminated” by the Law of Moses in the first place. Then, after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom (732 BCE), the region had been decimated of its Israelite leaders. Other peoples were resettled there by the Assyrians. By comparison with the Land of Judah near and about Jerusalem, this was virtually a pagan or Gentile territory at the time of Isaiah. It is a “Land of Darkness.” Yet, the prophet proclaims that God’s light will shine even there in some future time of great blessing.

### **1 Corinthians:**

Paul appeals for unity among the people of the Church at Corinth. Divisions had arisen on the basis of evangelical origins: “I heard the Gospel from Apollos.” “I heard it from Paul.” “I heard it directly from Christ.” Paul asks: “To whom do you belong? Was it not Christ who redeemed us all, no matter from whom we may have received the message?” “I belong to Pope Francis.” “I am a Charismatic Catholic.” “I follow the messages given at (whatever alleged apparition site)!” Again, the Church of Christ is divided.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What courage do you have when confronted with threats to your life and to your Christian commitments? Do you face up to the danger directly, without avoidance and delays? Do you see an example in the way Jesus went directly to Galilee to begin his ministry, the very land where Herod dwelled, the one who had imprisoned John? Why is this the only way to proceed when faced with opposition? Can avoidance and postponements have any good result?

2. Are you sure you have heard the personal call of Jesus, first to repent and then to become a disciple? Are you a Christian only because you have never made a decision not to be one? What is the concrete experience from your life that still summons you to follow the footsteps of Jesus? Is it true that *cultural Catholics* cannot survive in a culture that is no longer Christian? Explain what that means.

3. How can it be said that the Church continues the ministry of Jesus *in teaching and preaching the Gospel*? In what ways does the Church follow up on its preaching and teaching with *works of healing*? Describe the various healing ministries that are conducted by your parish community. Do you personally have a share in the preaching and healing of your community?

## **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

Ask your group, family, class, to help you identify the areas in your life and around you where there is still *darkness of sin and un-repentance, an absence of conversion to Christ*. Decide how you can bring the Gospel into those areas.

## **PRAYER**

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of Hosts  
Heaven and Earth are full of your Glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

## **CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**

Church unity derives from the integrity that is in Christ as the only-begotten Son of God. In the perfect unity of the Trinity of Persons, God called all creation to oneness of purpose and to reconciliation of differences. Christ has reconciled all things in himself and calls all human beings to be united to one another in him, to be presented as one sacrifice before the throne of God. There can be but one body of Christ; there cannot be two bodies of Churches. It is against the will of God that the Church of Jesus Christ be divided in faith, in love, and in service. If the Church is united spiritually, it must manifest this unity visibly in a unity of leadership and of external ministries.

From the very beginning, there were divisions in the body of the faithful. Some Jewish Christians could not be reconciled in fellowship with the Gentile Christians. There was disunity at the Eucharistic Table between the rich and the poor. With time, differences arose over doctrine concerning the true nature of Christ and of the role of the Holy Spirit. Political and cultural differences led to a rupture of fellowship in the body of the Church between the East and the West. The Protestant challenge could not be integrated in the reformation of the Church in the West. Some of these differences have been institutionalized into separate Church communities that reject one another as inauthentic Christians. The sin of disunity persists to this day between Ancient Oriental Christian Churches, Orthodox Christian Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and a multiplicity of Protestant Christian Churches.

Within the Catholic Church at the present time, some members reject each other's beliefs and devotional practices. There are allegations of unorthodoxy of doctrine. (The word "orthodoxy" means "truth." "Doctrine" means "what is being taught." So, untruth is being taught, according to some.) I was asked once whether I was a "Paul VI priest" by some who rejected the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Some Catholics claimed that the Mass of the newly revised liturgy was not valid. They refused to receive holy Communion from a priest who celebrated the Mass according to the revisions authorized by Pope Paul VI! Now, there are still tensions and accusations within the body of the Catholic Church itself. And Jesus weeps over the new Jerusalem. (Acclamation at the end of the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer)