

“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.” Words from our first reading today from the 8th chapter of the prophet Isaiah – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Baptism has been a theme for us for the past few weeks and it comes up in our readings today, so I thought this would be a good one for us: a 4-year-old named Ruth was conducting the baptismal service that Sunday morning. She held a cat over a barrel full of water. Trying to be as solemn as the pastor as she dunked her cat into the water, she repeated the phrase Trinitarian formula she had heard many times: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and in the Holy You Go-est!”

Often enough, people who think the same way join together and claim the namesake of a well-known person. This occurs today with religious or political leaders, with sports figures, or entertainers, and we know how passionate such supporters can become – think of how great our support is for the Buffalo Bills as opposed to say the New England Patriots. This was the case in the Corinthian Community from our second reading today. The early Christians there had deteriorated into arguing and rivalry and factions, and they began appealing to various authorities like Apollos, Cephas, and Paul who represented their own limited viewpoints. In pledging their loyalty to various groups and certain leaders, however, the Corinthians neglected the larger picture of working together to build God’s Kingdom, and they forgot that they were all brothers and sisters in Christ. Looking to bring them together, Paul had to ask rhetorically: “Is Christ divided? No, Christ cannot be divided... Was Paul crucified for you? No, Jesus alone died for our salvation... Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” No, we were not baptized in Paul’s name, nor were we baptized in the name of Apollos or Cephas, or Pope Francis, or Fr. Luke, or Terry Pegula, Sean McDermott, Donald Trump, Nancy Pelosi - you get the idea... we were baptized in God’s name. The innocent little girl pretty much had it right; we were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and so our allegiance and our loyalty and our belonging, all of us, ultimately is to God. There are always bound to be differences between us, but if we forget the common denominator that binds us together, namely that we are all God’s holy people, then as St. Paul warns us, we will remain fractioned and in the dark, even today.

Our readings this weekend have a lot to do with coming back into the light. Just as the Corinthians knew the darkness of division, the people of Israel from our first reading had just been conquered by the Assyrians. The darkness that came over the people in the first reading would have included social disintegration, political collapse, and religious devastation. The use of the word darkness could be a reference almost to extinction, as war ravaged the land, destroying their lives and livelihoods. In the midst of their gloom, however, Isaiah knew, that God could shine through their present darkness and that if God’s people could place their hope and trust in the Lord, then one day they would be free, would have an abundant harvest, and their joy would return to them.

Indeed, we know that God’s light has shone in the world - that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Peace is possible; unity is possible; joy is possible in the Lord who is our light and our salvation. That is what brings us to this Eucharist, to share in this communion, this unity with God together. The only thing Jesus asks of us is to repent, to turn around, to open ourselves up to something new that we can move beyond our own limited world and worldview and come into the light. It’s a scary thing to do.

If we want to live in the light we have to let go of the darkness; we have to make the conscious decision to let go of our factions, of our griefs, of our unfortunate histories, of our prejudices, our ideologies... And yet we resist our own happiness all the time. More often than not, people would rather hold onto a certain hardship rather than reach out to an uncertain good (2x). I know that there are parts of my lifestyle where I prefer the certainty of managing my own schedule and whom I meet, or having various possessions, or even deciding what I take to God in prayer and what I yet reserve in a corner of my heart giving into the illusion of control and security and immortality, instead of letting God truly take direction of my life, wherever that may lead. In some ways, I still prefer the certainty of my own darkness to the uncertainty of light. It's not easy to be like Peter, Andrew, James and John of our Gospel today... fishing was the only life that they knew, and it was a hard life. But who of us could simply and immediately leave behind our nets, our livelihoods, and our families? Who of us has given up everything, absolutely everything to follow Jesus into the light? We have a long way to go. The good news is God's light is accessible to us still, even in a broken, divided world and Church. And the more we say yes, the more we open ourselves, the more we come into Christ's light, the more the darkness will recede, the more joy we will find, the more familiar we will become with God's peace.

As today we are beginning Catholic Schools Week, I should mention that one way God's light continues to shine in our world is through the influence of Catholic Education. To this end, Mrs. Damico shared a scholarly article with me, entitled "Why Catholic Schools Have Regained their Place in Education Reform." Educators will tell you that many of the current best practices that have been adopted by charter schools and public school networks have come from Catholic Education. And yet our counterparts continue to look up to us as lights for the world as, quote, "the evidence suggests that Catholic schools [still] demonstrate stronger long-term outcomes, even as they struggle financially and struggle to compete for student enrollment and for solid state test scores... for example, Catholic school graduates are [less likely to engage in risky behaviors and] more likely to be civically engaged, to vote, to volunteer, and to give to charitable causes than their public-school peers. At the core of these successes is the way Catholic schools think about their students and why Catholic educators do this work... It's the result of a school culture animated by the belief that every child is made in the image and likeness of God and focused on drawing out of every pupil their own God-given potential." End-quote.¹ Indeed, on all the doors of our school, a sign reads, "Let it be known to all who enter here that Jesus Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen presence in all its classes, the model of its faculty, and the inspiration for its staff and students." This Catholic Schools week, we celebrate our Catholic heritage, and are grateful for the gift of a Catholic School in our midst, knowing that whether you are in the school or out of it, Catholic Education has been a positive influence on our young people and upon our community as a whole, helping us all to come more fully into God's light. May we continue to support Catholic Education, and may we, like the disciples, repent and believe in the good news, for out of the darkness a light has shone - the Kingdom of God is at hand!

¹ Kathleen Porter-Magee, "Why Catholic Schools Have Regained their Place in Education Reform," published 12/18/2019, accessed 1/24/2020, <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/why-catholic-schools-have-regained-their-place-education-reform>.

Readings: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/012620.cfm>

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 67

Reading 1IS 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 21 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,
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](#) **OR** [4:12-17](#)

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.

or

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