

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — A

READING I Is 8:23-9:3

READING II 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

GOSPEL Mt 4:12-23

### The Hebrew Scripture

Is 8:23 is a difficult verse. - The first "he" refers to King Pekah of Israel (740-731), whose kingdom (Zebulun, Naphtali) the neo-Assyrian king captured in 733, leaving only a small area around Samaria. The second "he" is probably King Hoshea of Israel (731-722), who revolted against the next neo-Assyrian king in 725. If there was any hope, Pekah would have brought shame and Hoshea would have brought honor. For Isaiah, however, preaching between 733 and 725, things will get worse before they get better. Only after the total gloom has been verified will the people break out into the joy typical of harvest time or booty distribution. At that moment, the Lord will restore the Davidic kingdom and crush all its enemies, as Gideon did against the Midianites.

### The Christian Testament

The Corinthian community was fractured into factions. Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, made a great impression on the better educated. Jewish Christians claimed allegiance to Cephas (Peter). The majority (from the lower classes) hailed Paul as their leader. There may even have been a fourth group, i.e., the "Christ" party which insisted on private revelations expressed in charismatic gifts. Paul replies to this situation by making an appeal for unity. The community should be willing to adapt and adjust to achieve harmony. There ought to be one objective and direction in their lives. Christianity is not Apollos or Cephas or Paul. Christianity is Christ. It was Christ who died for them, and in whose name, they entered the community. Paul concludes by insisting on his chief mission, namely, to preach the Gospel. That Gospel does not rest on the wisdom of the worldly philosopher but on the power of the cross.

### The Gospel

Jesus takes up where John left off. The translation "arrested" is better rendered "handed over." Matthew sees a link between the Baptist and Jesus, who will also be handed over (see Mt 17:22; 27:2, 26). Jesus also proclaims the same message as the Baptist (see Mt 3:2). Matthew has changed Mark's order (see Mk 1:15). Matthew has the imperative first and only then the basis for the imperative. In Jesus, God is taking a direct hand in human affairs. Abandoning human standards and accepting God's outlook ("repent") is the only adequate response.

Matthew cites Is 8:23-9:1 for his own theological purposes. In Isaiah, "sea" refers to the Mediterranean. In Matthew, the Sea of Galilee. In Isaiah, "Galilee of the Gentiles" designates the foreigners who conquered the area and deported the population. In Matthew, the same phrase is more of an official name for the district. Although Capernaum was in the tribal territory of Naphtali, Matthew adds "Zebulun" in v. 13 to fit the Isaian quotation. Although Jesus ministered only to Israel, still Matthew finds the beginning of the Gentile mission in Jesus' ministry. Thus, in the infancy narrative (Mt 2:22), he

adds "district of Galilee" to the "land of Israel" (Mt 2:21). Here in Mt 4:15-16, Matthew's use of the Isaian text shows that the ministry of Jesus is related to the Gentiles. For Matthew, Jesus is related to both Jews and Gentiles, the two groups which make up the Matthean community.

In the call of the first disciples, authority/response is stressed. Thus, the disciples immediately react to the authoritative call of Jesus. At the same time, the account demonstrates the cost of discipleship: The leaving of jobs and families. To this call, Matthew adds a summary of the ministry in 4:23-25. According to Mt 10:1, 7-8, the Twelve will also preach and heal, whereas teaching is reserved to Jesus during the public ministry.

### **The Thought**

A fragmented Christ is an inauthentic Christ. The modern Christian community is a divided community. All claim allegiance to Christ one way or another. All espouse a Christian viewpoint one way or another. Our temptation is to accept this status quo as the normal situation. But a fragmented Christ is an inauthentic Christ.

For Paul, the factions in the port city of Corinth did not demonstrate Christian unity. They were a pursuit of self. To claim Apollos or Cephas or Paul was not to be rooted in Christ. Redemption meant the Christ event, not the Apollos, Cephas, or Paul event. He exhorted them, therefore, to have the one objective and goal ("united in mind and judgment"). To speak of factions was to speak of the absence of Christ. The fragmented Christ is the inauthentic Christ. For Matthew, unity was also indispensable for the Christian Church. In his own community, there were both Jews and Gentiles. A community which excluded either group was an inauthentic community. He set about to demonstrate the Gentile thrust of Jesus' ministry. In Ch. 2, pagan astrologers accept Christ while the institution rejects him. In Ch. 4, Jesus' Galilean preaching is really the beginning of the Gentile mission according to Is 8:23-9:1. Within his own community, according to ch. 18, Matthew had to deal with scandal, the marginated, incorrigibility, and the unwillingness to forgive. Not to deal with these issues, hence a fragmented Christ, would result in an inauthentic Christ.

The modern Roman Catholic Christian is called upon to reflect the ecumenism of that community. To be just and honest with all mirrors the way of Christ and helps create harmony. To applaud the theological developments and successes in other Christian communities is to applaud the one Christ. To be truthful and hence not to gloss over genuine theological problems is to respect the integrity of the other communities. To join in common prayer is to ask that we may ultimately realize our intended oneness. To do any or all such things is to acknowledge that a fragmented Christ is an inauthentic Christ.

Eucharist is the parade example of Christian unity. As Paul put it, "We, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (I Cor 10:7). The one loaf is the challenge which Eucharist offers to the worshiping community. The unity of the local Eucharistic celebration is to become the catalyst for the unity of universal Eucharistic celebration. Until that point, we are reminded that a fragmented Christ is an inauthentic Christ.