

Bible Study

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, all truth is from you; you alone are the source of wisdom. Give us the joy of hearing your voice in the words we read today and the peace of tasting the depth of your love. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Tell about a time of special joy during the past week.
2. Green, the color of “hope,” is the liturgical color of Ordinary Time. About what are you especially hopeful?

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 8:23-9:3

Zebulun and Naphtali were the 2 sons of Jacob whose families were assigned the northernmost territory in what came to be Israel. Their “darkness” was that they were swallowed up by the Assyrian armies in order that Assyria could have a direct link to the Mediterranean Sea. Isaiah brought the Lord’s promise that their freedom would one day be restored. In Jesus’ time this was the territory that was called “Galilee,” and it included Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, and the Sea of Galilee were.

Read the First Reading aloud. Notice that it spans the end of Chapter 8 and the beginning of Chapter 9.

1. To understand better the reference to Midian in verse 3, read Judges 6:3-6 and 7:1-22.
2. To whom does “District of the Gentiles” probably refer?
3. Find 5 depressing words and then 5 uplifting words in this reading.
4. Could the “darkness” in verse 1 be a spiritual darkness? How might throwing off the yoke of the Assyrians have brought about a *spiritual* light to the believers in this territory?

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Last Sunday’s Second Reading was the introductions that began Saint Paul’s letter. With that finished, we now learn about one of the main purposes for his letter: divisions within the Church. We can easily detect his anger as he speaks about rivalries that could destroy the young Church. However, he also recognizes that the factions are the result of an improper, incomplete understanding of the meaning of baptism. His message is still appropriate in our day.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Who were Apollos and Cephas?
2. What does it mean to be united in the “same mind”?
3. How does Saint Paul show that Jesus is not just one among many great preachers and reformers?
4. When we say in the creed that we profess *one* Church, what is the source of that unity, according to this?
5. Faith is not comprised of believing stories about Jesus or carefully worded statements of doctrine. According Saint Paul in verse 17, what was and is the primary source of faith and, hence, salvation?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:12-23

Although we move this week from reading John’s Gospel to the weekly reading from Matthew’s Gospel during Cycle A, the story line is unbroken. Last week John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his followers and identified him as the Promised One. This week we hear how Jesus went to some of those same followers after Herod had arrested John. Apparently, they had already heard Jesus preach because they were ready to put their careers on hold immediately. Little did they know, it was the first step of a very long journey.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Matthew’s Gospel was written primarily for Christians of Jewish background. How would quoting the Book of Isaiah in this place strengthen his proof that Jesus is the Messiah?
2. Which words in this reading sum up the general focus of Jesus’ teaching?
3. Who else had proclaimed the same message (Matt. 3:2) before Jesus took up the continuation of his work?
4. If there is a map in the back of your Bible or if you have access to the internet, what direction is it from Nazareth to Capernaum? Which country lies just to the northeast of Capernaum?

5. Few of the great Hebrew prophets proclaimed God's message among the people of those 2 northern Hebrew tribes. Point out a sign that the Galileans felt privileged that Jesus spent much of his time among them.
6. What were the 3 components of Jesus' ministry, as identified here by Matthew?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. All 3 of today's readings contain a call to changing how one lives: in Isaiah the change is from despair to hope in God's care, in Paul it is a change from competition to unity, in Jesus we hear a call to holiness and a call to vocation. Has God called you to any of these changes lately? Tell about one or two.
2. How can people around you see that you believe Jesus is the Son of God and that you have accepted his call to live as his disciple?
3. Which personal characteristic is your strongest asset in being a witness to the Gospel?
4. What happens within a parish if people choose to accent how they are different from other parishioners or from other parishes?
5. Discuss how accenting our differences stands in the way of the Christian Church being more fully unified?
6. How can a parish, even if its members have great diversity in occupations, ethnic backgrounds, or income levels, cultivate unity?
7. This Sunday falls within the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. How could we apply the words of Saint Paul in our prayers this week?

Closing Prayer

"Lord Jesus Christ, our light, our joy, our hope, our teacher, our example and our Savior, call us again today to turn away from our weaker habits in order to follow you more closely. Help us to be agents of unity and prophets of peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Sign of the Cross)