

# Scripture Study

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



## Opening prayer

Isaiah 8:23—9:3

(Ps 27:1,4,13-14)

1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17

**Matthew 4:12-23**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading takes place after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) and after John the Baptist had been arrested by King Herod (Matthew 14:1-12).
- Jesus travels from the Jordan where John had been baptizing (Matthew 3:13), stops by his hometown of Nazareth, and goes to live in the fishing village of Capernaum, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (verse 13). It is from here that his ministry will be based.
- This area was called "Galilee of the Gentiles" (verse 15) because of its mixed Jewish/pagan population. When ancient Israel was overrun by the Assyrians around 733 B.C., the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to be devastated, its occupants deported. The prophet Isaiah foretold they would be the first to be restored when Israel's glory returned.
- Jesus comes preaching a gospel of repentance, using the same words as John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2). The word "repent" (Greek: *metanoia*) literally means to "change (your mind)"

## Questions:

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, Isaiah prophesies a time when those who historically bore the brunt of enemy oppression, will be the first to see "a great light" of deliverance. How might this translate to spiritual terms? Who is in the best position to recognize that they need a Savior?
- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, how do rivalries among believers impede the spread of the Kingdom of God? According to Saint Paul, what core message of the Gospel should we be focusing on?
- In today's Gospel, how does Jesus react to John's imprisonment?
- How had the land been "sitting in darkness" (verse 16, Isaiah 8:22—9:1)? What was Jesus' message? What is the relation between repentance, the kingdom of heaven, and the light?
- What invitations does Jesus give to the fishermen? What seems unusual about their response? What prior knowledge of Jesus do you think they had (verses 13, 17; John 1:35-42)? How might Zebedee (verse 21, 22) have felt?
- From how far away are the crowds coming (verses 23-25; refer to a Bible map)? What needs do they have? What are they learning about God's kingdom?
- How has coming to know Jesus been like moving from darkness to light for you? In what ways does God's kingdom seem present for you? In what ways does it seem "not yet"?
- Spiritually, are you still preparing the nets? Leaving the boat? Following hard after Jesus? Feeling left behind? What exactly does it mean to you to "repent"?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1720, 1989, 878**

## Closing Prayer

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!**

*Just as at sea those who are carried away from the direction of the harbor bring themselves back on course by a clear sign, on seeing a tall beacon light or some mountain peak coming into view, so Scripture may guide those adrift on the sea of life back into the harbor of the divine will.*

--St. Gregory of Nyssa

# “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light”

**Scripture:** *Matthew 4:12-23*

**Meditation:** Do you know the joy and freedom of the gospel? John the Baptist’s enemies had sought to silence him, but the gospel cannot be silenced. As soon as John had finished his testimony Jesus began his in Galilee. Galilee was at the crossroads of the world and much traffic passed through this little region. It had been assigned to the tribes of Asher, Napthali and Zebulun when the Israelites first came into the Promised Land (see Joshua 9). For a long time it had been under Gentile occupation. Isaiah foretold (see Isaiah 9) that *the good news of salvation* would be proclaimed in this land and reach to the Gentiles. Jesus begins the proclamation of the gospel here to fulfill the word of God. The Old Testament prophets spoke of God’s promise to send a Redeemer who would establish God’s rule of peace and righteousness. That time is now fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus takes up John’s message of repentance and calls disciples to believe in the good news he has come to deliver. What is the good news which Jesus delivers? It is the good news of *peace* (restoration of relationship with God), of *hope* (the hope of resurrection and heaven), of *truth* (God’s word is true and reliable), of *promise* (he rewards those who seek him), of *immortality* (God gives everlasting life), and the good news of *salvation* (liberty from sin and freedom to live as sons and daughters of God). The gospel is the power and wisdom of God: power to change and transform our lives and wisdom to show us how to live as sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit the Lord makes it possible for us to receive his word with faith and to act upon it with trust.

In announcing the good news, Jesus made two demands: *repent and*



*believe!* Repentance requires a life-change and a transformation of heart and mind. The Holy Spirit gives us a repentant heart, a true sorrow and hatred for sin and its consequences, and a firm resolution to avoid it in the future. The Holy Spirit gives us grace to see our sin for what it is – rebellion and a rejection of the love of God. God’s grace helps us to turn away from all that would keep us from his love. Faith or belief is an entirely free gift which God makes to us. Believing is only possible by grace and the help of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and converts it to God. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for us to accept and believe the truth. To believe is to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to redeem us from the slavery of sin and death. God made the supreme sacrifice of his Son on the cross to bring us back to himself. Do you know the love of God that surpasses all else and that impels us to give him our all? God wants to change our way of thinking and transform our lives by the power of his word.

Jesus chose as his closest friends and coworkers those who were ready to follow as his disciples and he gave them an unusual mission – “to catch people for the kingdom of God”. What kind of disciples did Jesus choose? Smelly fishermen! In the choice of the first apostles (Peter, Andrew, James and John) we see a characteristic feature of Jesus’ work: he chose very ordinary people. They

were non-professionals, had no wealth or position of power or fame in society. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special marks of education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these individuals, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. When the Lord calls us to be his disciples and co-workers, we must not think we have nothing to offer him in exchange. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you believe that God wants to work through and in you for his glory?

Jesus speaks the same message to us today: we will “catch people” for the kingdom of God if we allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through us. God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live, speak, and witness the joy of the gospel. Paul the Apostles says, “But thanks be to God, who in Christ Jesus always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:15). Do you show others around you the joy of the gospel and do you pray for your neighbors, co-workers, and relatives that they may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in the knowledge of his love?

*“Lord Jesus, your ways are life and light! Let your word – the good news of the Gospel – penetrate my heart and transform my mind that I may see your glory and truth. Help me to follow you and do what is pleasing in your sight”*

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