

### THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23*

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles- the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea-for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

#### REFLECTION 1: EXCHANGING GIFTS

Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, has an interesting response to the question as to why so few people 'leave all' to follow a dream - or to pursue a noble goal. He says that they are afraid to become what they are capable of being. They thrill at the possibility, but they also shudder at the thought. And today we ask ourselves the question, how do we respond to the thought of stepping out in faith to follow Jesus more closely? How do we react to the idea of embarking on a noble goal with Jesus? After all, we are what we are is God's gift to us, but what we become is our gift back to God.

In today's Gospel Jesus called Peter and his brother Andrew as they were netting fish along the shores of Lake Galilee. He asked them simply to leave all and to follow him and that he would teach them as he put it, to become 'fishers of men'. At once we are told that they left their nets and followed him - no hesitation, no second thoughts, no going back to sort it all out with family and friends. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus was fulfilling a prophesy of Isaiah, that the people living in the region of Galilee who were subject to the darkness of oppression, ruled by a foreign power and who worshipped false gods; these people through Jesus, the Light of the World, would themselves be bathed in this New Light.

To bring that message of the Good News, Jesus could have gone to the influential and powerful in the land and engaged them in spreading the saving message, but rather he chose to follow the compass of God his heavenly Father whose wisdom it was to choose the lowest and the least likely people in whom to work the wonders of grace. And so, the fishermen from the Sea of Galilee immediately responded to the invitation of Jesus. However, the people who were to receive the message had first of all to repent, the word used by Jesus was 'metanoia', to change a garment that had been inside-out and put it on the right way. So the garment of their lives, sullied by the darkness of error, was to be turned around so that the light of true living was to shine through all they encountered.

Today, so many in these recessionary times endure the experience of walking in darkness. Every day matters of heavy import can weigh heavily on worried minds, about mortgages, negative equity, paying bills, waiting for medical assessment, trying to heal friendships while coping with raw memories. Whenever we have a sense of walking in darkness, we can take comfort from that Great Light that has come into our lives, wherever shadows fall. Jesus is the one who calls us by name and invites us to follow him, as did the apostles on that sunny morning by the Lake of Galilee. Those who accept the call to belong to Him become part of the community who break bread together on the Lord's Day. As Jesus may have whispered in the hearing of his disciples, he also assures us, 'not to be afraid'. What we are is God's gift to us, but what we become is our gift back to God.

## **REFLECTION 2:**

## **SEEING A GREAT LIGHT**

St. Matthew tells us that by settling in Capernaum - a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulon and Nathalie, Jesus fulfilled the words of the Prophet Isaiah (Matthew 4: 12-23). Zebulon and Nathalie were ancient Israelite tribes who settled in Galilee and during the time of the prophet, these were the first two tribes to be crushed by the invading Assyrians. Subsequently the people of Israel were subjected to the darkness of oppression; ruled by a foreign power that worshipped false gods. Isaiah looked forward to a new king in Jerusalem who would arise and set Israel free - bringing the light of hope to a people who walked in darkness.

According to Matthew, Jesus is this new king who has come to call people from darkness into the light of a relationship with him. Preaching a message of repentance, using the same words of John the Baptist, Jesus brings the kingdom of God close to his very person. Jesus chose to follow the example of God whose wisdom it was to choose the lowest and least likely people in whom to work the wonders of grace. And so, the fishermen from the Sea of Galilee immediately respond to the invitation of Jesus. Whatever darkness meant for them, they saw and encountered in Jesus a great light. It is high credit to their generosity that when the light of God's merciful love dawned on them, they left everything and followed him.

As we come to know Peter and Andrew, James and John, along with the other disciples, we realise that they were far from being perfect. They all had their darkness, their fear, their lack of understanding, their struggle to believe, but they were also captivated by the glowing presence of this carpenter from the plains of Galilee. Today, so many of our people in these challenging times endure the experience of walking in darkness. Everyday items can weigh on minds worried about mortgages, vulture funds, negative equity, paying bills, waiting to see a doctor, anxious about a loved one, trying to mend friendships, coping with raw memories. Whenever we have a sense of walking in darkness, we can take courage from the great light that has come into our world. Whatever shadows may fall across our path, Jesus is the one who calls us by name and invites us to follow him. One thing for sure we owe to Jesus is his constant reminder to us not to be afraid.

The prophet Isaiah described the people of his day as walking in darkness, waiting for a king who would free them from oppression. Jesus is that king of light who frees us from darkness by calling us to follow him. He is with us today as he was to his first disciples. Those who accept his call to belong to him are also called to belong to others, serving their needs, their faith and encouraging their hopes, as Jesus did.