

3rd Sunday A Ordinary Time - St. Edward Parish

Introduction

Our culture is violent and badly divided. Think of the tragic shooting yesterday in the Columbia Mall – where three people lost their lives and others were injured and terrified or the 20 people who have been killed already this year in the city of Baltimore. All day long people are arguing on cable news, blogs, and tweets. Politically, the country is so divided that gridlock has set in. Moral values once held sacred seem to be crumbling. Meanwhile many people remain poor, vulnerable, disenfranchised. Just last week thousands of people braved frigid temperatures to attend the March for Life – to plead for lives of the unborn and for help for women facing difficult pregnancies. In many neighborhoods in this city of Baltimore, people are homeless, unemployed, addicted to drugs, exposed to violence. Many young people are facing a future seemingly without hope. Yes, we don't have to look far to see the gloomy side of life.

But be of good cheer; we are in good company. For the land from which Jesus came was also thought to be pretty gloomy. He grew up in Nazareth, and as one of his future apostles asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46) The poor village of Nazareth couldn't compare with the holy city of Jerusalem. Yet, as you recall, Jesus received a poor reception even in his hometown synagogue. At first the townsfolk of Nazareth were cordial, even enthusiastic, but when Jesus' words sank in, they resisted him, so Jesus moved on. Now we find Jesus in Galilee, and Galilee was the spiritual boondocks – referred to in today's Gospel as Capernaum by the sea, in region of Zebulun & Naphtali. It was half-Jewish, half-Gentile territory, regarded as religiously & culturally confused. It was here that the Savior of the world chose really to begin his ministry, rather than Judea, where the level of religious expertise and practice was great.

What does Jesus say? "This is a hopeless place? I need a better venue?" No, repeats the words of Isaiah the prophet heard in our first reading: "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.”

Christ Our Light

Jesus is the light of the world, not only those parts of the world that appear to be in good order but especially those parts of the world where there is sickness, poverty, and injustice. Jesus is the light of the world, not just those parts of the world that are open to religion but also those parts where people live as if there is no God. Jesus comes as our light to dispel the gloom created by godless living. He comes to overcome the darkness of our sins by the light of his truth and by the warmth of divine love.

But before we go any further, let’s ask ourselves a question. Have we seen the light? Or do we still grope in the darkness? Like the Shepherds in Bethlehem and the Magi from the East, have we seen the light rising above the place where Christ was born? Have we allowed the light of Christ to enter our hearts and to guide our way? Or do we prefer to sit in darkness, to use the gloom an excuse for our sins, &, in the process, to make things even gloomier for ourselves and for our loved ones?

As Jesus walked through the land of Galilee, his message was: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand ... ” That is the key to seeing the light. As long as we are content in our sins, our eyes will not be accustomed to the light. In fact, when the light of God’s grace shines on us, we’ll look the other way, unless and until we accept the grace of true contrition for our sins, and then make a good unburdening confession of our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That is how the light, the light of Christ, overcomes the gloom in our interior lives.

Not Alone

Notice, though, as Jesus walked through Galilee, he chose helpers to spread the light. He began to choose the twelve apostles, Simon, called Peter & his brother Andrew. The Gospel reading simply says, “They were fishermen” – not experts in the law and the prophets, not the leading men of the village, but people who worked and worked hard to make ends meet.

Come to think of it, Jesus refers to all kinds of occupations in the Gospels. He refers to farmers who plant wheat. To soldiers who fight. To doctors who heal, to

innkeepers, housewives, business people, and shepherds. You see, the Gospel is addressed to you and me – no matter where we live, no matter what we do: whether you're a student or a government worker, in HR or IT – whether you're a stay-at-home mom or retired or unemployed, Jesus is the light of *your* world and he is calling you to help him, to be his co-worker. Sometimes responding to that call means leaving one's occupation as when a young man leaves his school or job to become a priest or a young woman her studies or work to become a religious. But for many people it means following Jesus and working for the Kingdom of God right in their own homes and places of work.

“Ah, business as usual” we might be tempted to think. But let us make no mistake – There's a big leap between our daily occupation and our supernatural calling. If we truly welcome the light of Christ into our hearts, we are transformed, changed, from the inside out. We may live in the same neighborhood, the same house, with the same people, we may do the same work day in and day out, but there's a critical difference. It's no longer we who live but Christ is living in us, speaking in us, acting in us. So for all our sinfulness and weakness, we are given the grace to choose what is good instead of what is evil, to develop in our hearts virtues and to root from our hearts vices; and more than that, we are given the grace to lead lives of charity and service, even in the nitty-gritty of daily life, even when our charity is rejected. And as this happens in our lives, we become credible witness of Jesus to others. The light of Christ shines through us onto a culture overshadowed by gloom.

No Division

A final point comes to us from the pen of St. Paul. Writing to the contentious Corinthians, Jesus warns them against dis-unity – the kind of disunity that makes our culture so gloomy and lonely, the kind of disunity that creeps into the church's life as people break into factions, gossip, and cling to their views and opinions at the expense of the Gospel.

St. Paul tells us to put all that aside, to strive for unity, to fix our eyes on the same light, the same Savior, the same faith. For, when we are united in allowing the light of Christ to shine through each of us, then the light continues to grow brighter and its power to dispel the gloom becomes more evident. When we are one in professing our faith in the living Word of God, one in repenting of our sins through the

Sacrament of Reconciliation, one in celebrating the one saving sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, then it is that our culture is transformed from the inside out – not merely by the imposition of more laws, regulations, and policies (good and necessary as they may be) but by citizens whose hearts have touched by light of truth and the warmth of love. This is the way we let the light of Christ dispel the gloom.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!