

Archbishop's CMA Audio Homily - January 22, 2017

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Is 8:23-9:3; Ps 27: 1, 4, 13-14; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt. 4:12-17 (longer option)

This is Archbishop Dennis Schnurr with some reflections on how today's Scripture readings are calling us to follow the Lord in our lives, just as his first disciples did in theirs. The readings are asking us both to follow the light and to be the light.

The contrasting images of light and darkness appear throughout the Bible in deeply symbolic ways, from the first chapter of the Book of Genesis to the final chapter of the Book of Revelation. Darkness is seldom a good thing, even today. From the time that we are children we know that dangers may lurk there. However, darkness as a metaphor of ignorance and hopelessness must have resounded even more powerfully in Biblical times, when the only remedy was a candle or at best a torch.

“The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.” This sentence from the Book of Isaiah in today's first reading refers to a light much more profound than any torch. Written more than eight centuries before Christ, the passage comes from a section of Isaiah known as the Immanuel Prophecies. In these twelve chapters the great Hebrew prophet of Israel looks ahead to a savior who will free His people from the yoke of oppression and bring great joy and rejoicing. The Church, beginning in the New Testament itself, has always seen the Immanuel Prophecies as applying to Jesus. St. Matthew explicitly makes that connection in our Gospel reading today, quoting Isaiah directly.

The psalm refrain picks up on that same theme of light when it says: “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” This is not a light to be hidden under a bushel basket. Although Jesus withdraws to Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptist, he begins preaching repentance and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Shortly thereafter, he called the first disciples – Simon Peter and Andrew, then James and John. And each of these pairs “followed him,” St. Matthew says without further elaboration. That is the definition of a disciple of Jesus: one who follows Him. It is as simple and as difficult as that.

A few verses later in the Gospel of Matthew, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His disciples, including all of us, “You are the light of the world . . . your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” (Mt. 5:14, 16). So the light is not only Jesus, but the entire Body of Christ; that is WE, the Church. By following the light in word and deed, we ourselves become the light.

And who can doubt that our increasingly secular world today desperately needs that light? In the face of poverty, crime, addiction, ignorance, despair, violence, discrimination, and injustices of all kinds, we are all called to be disciples making disciples. Tens of thousands of you throughout the Archdiocese do that every day by giving generously of your time and talent as volunteers in schools, parishes, athletic programs, hospitals, prisons, and other areas of need. This is both discipleship in action – letting your light shine – and good stewardship of God’s gracious gifts.

We all have something to contribute in this way, regardless of our age or skills or interests. However, for a variety of reasons, we are also limited as human beings in our ability to personally do all the good that we would like to do. The Catholic Ministries Appeal gives us the opportunity to do together as the local Church what we cannot do separately as individuals. In fact, it enables us to do what Jesus did. After calling the disciples, today’s Gospel reports: “He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.” The ministries supported by the Catholic Ministries Appeal also teach, evangelize, heal and provide a path of hope to those in need. You may recall that the ministries are:

Catholic Charities and Catholic Social Services;

Campus, Hospital, and Prison ministries;

Seminary and Vocations;

St. Rita School for the Deaf;

Retired Archdiocesan Priests; and

New Evangelization programming.

Good stewardship takes gifts and multiplies them, as Jesus did with the loaves and fish. That is what you do when you make a contribution to the Catholic Ministries Appeal. And that is why no gift is too small; no one need feel excluded from participating because of economic limitations. From my visits to the ministries supported by the Catholic Ministries Appeal, I can assure you that they also are good stewards of the financial resources you entrust to them.

Those who carry out these ministries and programs are grateful on a daily basis for your participation in their work through your generous donations. As Archbishop, I share that gratitude. Thank you for being a light in the darkness.