**Restoration**

All our readings point us to how God restores us when we return to him after we have sinned. The consequences of deadly sin, is alienation from God. By sinning, we lose the sanctifying grace we receive from God that we need to help us from falling into sin and living a virtuous fruitful life. Sin causes departure from God’s glory. However, God the good Shepherd in His love and mercy, is always in search of His lost sheep so we can be restored to receive His glory again. When we disobey God, we walk away from Him. Restoration comes for us when we regain our faith in God and surrender to His will.

The invisible God, see us as His friends and is always in search of us so that He could invite us to be part of His life. He wants to bestow on us His infinite love and mercy. Our response to Him should be by having faith in Him; knowing that He is the only Person who can save us. By obedience of faith, we will completely submit our intellect and free will to God, telling Him to do with us as He wills because we know that whatever He does, He does, for the love of us. He has written His laws into our hearts so we can know and do His will. It is then that we will have the peace, joy and happiness we are searching for.

In obedience to God by faith, we will submit freely to His word we hear daily because its truth is guaranteed. He will alleviate our worry and sorrow with His gentle love and grant us the grace and strength to face with a smile, any trial and tribulation that might come our way in this life. When we have faith in Him, we will place our worries in His hands and He will restore us with His everlasting love and mercy, and He will give us His grace to acknowledge His holy will.

Like the father of the prodigal son, God is always waiting for us to return to Him so He can lavish us with His love and restore us again and again to be His beloved sons and daughters.

In our first reading, from the Book of Prophet Isaiah, we are given a picture of two cities Zebulun and Naphtali that had moved away from God’s ways. Zebulun and Naphtali were the names of two of Jacob’s 12 sons. They were given the land during Israel’s Exodus when the nations of Israel was being formed. For a while, they were degraded in the eye of God. God subjected them to the rule of the Assyrians after the conquest of 722 BC. God subjected them to this degrade so they could learn a lesson that their strength and hope are in the Lord. And not in any alliance they could form with other nations.

The Assyrians, were pagans, who captured the two tribes, hauled their abled bodied to Assyria and left some remnant. They brought their own people to mingle with the remnant they left behind, a tactical way of avoiding insurrection. The remnant, had a problem practicing their faith and tradition. Instead, they mingled with the Assyrians and practiced their pagan faith. That was why Isaiah referred to the land as **“a place of darkness.”** However, whenever there was a new king, they had great expectation that the prophecy of Isaiah would be fulfilled and they would be free again. They did not realize that true freedom would only come at the coming of the Messiah.

In Isaiah’s prophecy, we heard that the land would be glorified, and anguish would be no more, darkness would be dispelled, gloom and distress would be gone. There would be great rejoicing among the people. They would see a great Light who would be the Messiah, the **“…Wonder-Councilor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace…”** (Isiah 9:5). He will be the One who would restored them as God’s people again.

In our second reading, a continuation of our last week’s reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Paul instructed the divided people of Corinth to be restored to the true source of their faith in Jesus Christ the foundation stone of their faith. They had fallen into serious error in their doctrine and in practice. Different groups said, they were following Paul, or Apollo, or Cephas (Peter), and some said they were following Christ. Paul challenged all of them to build their faith on the solid foundation of Christ who is the only Messiah who came to save all of creation and humanity. He reminded them that it was Christ who suffered and died for them.

Paul was uncompromising in his message. He let the Corinthians know in our reading last week that he was called to be an apostles of Jesus Christ by God. So, he and others they claimed to be following, were messengers of Jesus Christ. He like Peter and the others were called by Jesus to be apostles just as we heard about the call of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. He was asking them, how can the clay become the potter? He was reminding them that Jesus said “Take up your cross and follow me,” not follow Paul, or Apollos, or Peter. Paul encouraged them to be united instead of being divided.

In our Gospel reading, we are told that after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus left Nazareth and went to Galilee. John was the bridge between the OT Prophets and the coming of the Messiah. So there was a marked separation between the Old and the New. Jesus did not start His public ministry until John the Baptist’s ministry ended and Jesus mission statement was the same as John’s mission statement; **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** By going to the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah in our first reading. The old tribal area of Zebulun and Naphtali had become three Assyrian provinces of Galilee, Dor and Gilead.

Jesus began His public ministry and the restoration creation with God in Galilee as foretold by Isaiah. It was the beginning of unity the created with the Creator. Jesus started by choosing four of His disciples in the region. He told them to follow Him and He will make them fishers of men. So that His mission would continue after He returns to God the Father the One who sent Him. He in turn, sent the apostles. The Apostles then choose Bishops, Presbyters or Priests, Deacons, and every baptized person to carry on the mission of Jesus’ restoration of creation. There is a key word that Jesus used “follow Me” which means to listen, and act on what we heard.

His call is for all of us to become fishers of men by being true disciples following in His footstep. We are commissioned to spread the light of Christ that we received at Baptism and during Confirmation to the rest of the world. We are to love God and love our neighbor as God loves us.

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask for His grace so we can be a restorer and not a divider of His Gospel.