

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

This is one of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

²³First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles. Zebulun and Naphtali were the two northernmost provinces of Israel and thus were the first to be overrun by the Assyrians in 733 B.C.² The inhabitants were deported to Assyria and the regions were repopulated by pagan colonists. For this reason the north was traditionally associated with the darkness of paganism.⁴ The rest of the sentence refers to the region of Galilee, Nazareth and Capernaum.⁵ St. Matthew sees the prophecy fulfilled in Christ's ministry in that area.⁴ **Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress.** The prophet refers to Israel's oppression as gloom, anguish and darkness. He foresees an end to the darkness with the coming of a great light that will set Israel free, bringing great joy and gladness.¹

^{9:1}**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;** The birth of Jesus is the coming of the light.¹ **upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.** The prophet speaks in the past tense, but this is called the prophetic past. It expresses the certainty of the future event by speaking of it as already accomplished.¹ Today's Gospel reading from Matthew, who often refers to the Hebrew Scriptures, quotes the above passage from Isaiah.

²**You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.** The joy of liberation is compared to that experienced during the harvest festivals in ancient Israel or that of victors when they distribute the spoils of the vanquished enemy.⁴

³**For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster** The oxen's yoke was a common image of enslavement. The pole was the bar of the yoke that pressed down on the shoulders. The rod of the taskmaster (a stick 5 to 7 feet long with a sharp point on one end) would prod or beat the animal or the slave.¹ **you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.** Liberation from this yoke meant political freedom. Yahweh would free them just as once before he made Gideon victorious over Midian in the time of the Judges.⁴

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

¹⁰**I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** Paul only calls on the name of the Lord when he has very serious council to offer. He makes it clear that it is a very grave matter to put the unity of the Church at risk.⁸ **that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.** The divisions among the Corinthians are the main threat to the gospel. Paul gives his reaction to the gross disorders reported to him. He shows how these factions betray the Corinthians' grasp of true wisdom.⁷

¹¹**For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you.** We know nothing about Chloe but the members of her household, probably her slaves, informed Paul of the factions at Corinth.⁶

¹²I mean that each of you is saying, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” This was a Jew from Alexandria who preached Jesus as the Messiah, although he was still a disciple of John the Baptist; but Priscilla and Aquila met him at Ephesus and gave him full instruction in “the Way.” Paul speaks of Apollos as watering what he himself had planted.⁶ or “I belong to Cephas,” Peter or “I belong to Christ.” There do not seem to be any great doctrinal differences dividing the people, for Paul does not describe or challenge any of their beliefs. It seems, rather, that the Corinthians were dividing into cliques based on allegiance to a particular preacher. It is unclear just who formed the fourth group which claimed direct leadership by Christ; perhaps they were charismatics who claimed special revelations not given to others.¹

¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?
¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel Paul cherished and extolled baptism in other passages but he saw his mission as preaching the gospel and probably left the administration of baptism to helpers. In the verses we skip today, Paul rejoices that he only baptized a few of the Corinthians, so that most have no basis for claiming baptism in his name.¹ and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, The power of the gospel to move an audience derives from the message itself, not from the messenger who delivers it. Paul’s mission, therefore, is not to please the ear with the eloquent speaking ability so admired by the Corinthians, but to move the heart by speaking of Christ crucified in clear and simple terms.⁹ so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning. This phrase has been used several times by Pope John Paul II against those who make light of the seriousness of sin.

Matthew 4:12-23

The Gospel of Matthew is told as a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and it comes full circle when the disciples are told to return to Galilee from Jerusalem after the Resurrection for a meeting with the risen Lord.⁵

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. With the decline of John, Jesus’ rise will begin. John had himself said, “I must decrease and He must increase.”³

¹³He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, Capernaum was a larger city and we presume that Jesus wished to reach a wider audience.¹⁰ in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali,

¹⁴that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

¹⁵Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, The first part of Israel to experience the destroying wrath of Yahweh shall be the first to hear of his salvation.¹⁰

¹⁶the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.

¹⁷From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This means that the manifestation of the supreme power of God is at hand. The first response to this is repentance; for sin is a refusal to accept the reign of God.¹⁰

¹⁸As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, Peter is always first in the lists of the apostles in the gospels. While he has been called, “The Big Fisherman,” according to archaeologists who studied the bones that Pope Paul VI declared to be those of his earliest predecessor, Peter was a stocky, muscular man, but only five feet, four inches tall. He is thought to have been about the same age as Jesus and to have died by being crucified upside down when he was 67 to 72 years of age.¹¹ and his brother Andrew, Andrew, originally a disciple of John the Baptist, is mentioned 12 times in scripture and almost always was identified as “Simon Peter’s brother. He is the patron saint of both Scotland and Russia and his symbol is a cross shaped like an X. He was crucified and although he was finally released, he died shortly thereafter in 69 A.D.¹¹ casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. Peter and Andrew worked in partnership with another boat owner, Zebedee, whose sons were James and John.¹¹

¹⁹He said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The natural skills of these fishermen are raised to a new and spiritual level by grace and they are thus enabled to gather souls for the kingdom as missionaries in the Church.¹² This would have been unusual because in Jewish circles the disciple usually sought out a teacher. Here the teacher chooses.

²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, James was possibly the oldest apostle born about 15 B.C. and also the first to die as he was beheaded in Jerusalem in 42 A.D. the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. This is John the Evangelist who lived the longest of any of the apostles and who was thought to be the closest to Jesus, even standing at the foot of the cross. He took care of Mary, the Mother of Jesus until the time of her dormition. The mother of these boys was Salome, a sister of the Blessed Mother. If that is true, James and John were first cousins of Jesus.¹¹ They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.

²²He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him. Notice that they were called in the midst of ordinary work and that they responded immediately.²

²³He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, Since Jewish men were required to travel to the Jerusalem Temple only three times annually, the synagogue was a complementary site for non-sacrificial worship and education during the remainder of the year. Assemblies were normally held on the Sabbath evening and the liturgy centered on the proclamation and explanation of the Hebrew Bible.¹² proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people. This verse is a kind of summary of what Jesus was doing in the early part of his ministry in Galilee — teaching, proclaiming and curing.¹³

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (4) “The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-59” by M. McNamara, M.S.C., (5) “Isaiah: Volume 1” by John F. A. Sawyer, (6) “Dictionary Of The Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (7) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians” by Mary Ann Getty, (8) “The Navarre Bible: Corinthians,” (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians,” (10) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (11) “The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary” by Bernard Ruffin, (12) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew,” and (13) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Recorders: 2005” by Martin Connell.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.

