

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle - A; Jan. 22nd 2023
Isaiah 8: 23-9: 3; 1Corinthians1:10-13; Matthew 4: 12-23

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

In every culture and religion light symbolizes God or his very presence and darkness stands for evil. It is a common belief that those who follow the precepts of God remain in light and others who are in sins live in darkness. The ancient Romans worshiped the Sun as god for its mighty light. In Judaism the presence of God is shown in the form of wind, cloud and fire. From the very early stage of Christianity, the Christians had no difficulty to accept Jesus as the light of the world. That is why, when Christianity became the official religion of Rome, the feast of the Sun god was replaced with Christmas, to celebrate the true light that is Jesus Christ. The Christmas light decorations represent the real light which is Jesus. We believe that God sent the true light into the world in the person of Jesus Christ to expel the spiritual darkness from the hearts of man.

In today's gospel Matthew sets the scene for the public ministry of Jesus. Matthew always sees the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies in Jesus and in today's gospel we hear one from Isaiah. Isaiah predicted the rise of light for the people of Zebulun and Naphtali who were contempt to live in darkness due to the Assyrian occupation. But Isaiah does not specify the identity that light or where it comes from. As Jesus started his public ministry in Galilee the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, right away Matthew could recognize that light as Jesus. Only Matthew speaks about a star rising at the birth of Jesus which symbolizes Jesus himself.

Though Matthew presents Jesus to be the rising star to mankind, it is John the Evangelist who specifically portrays Jesus as the true light. In the very beginning of his gospel we see John the Baptist testifying Jesus as the light coming to the world. **In chapter 1: 6ff we read, "A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."** In John chapter 12: 35- 36 Jesus admits that indeed, he is the light, saying, **"The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light."** Jesus continues in v. 46, **"I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness."** From the words of Jesus it is evident that just because the light is there, everyone is not going to be in it, but only the one who **believes in Jesus** will remain in light. Here comes

the matter of human free will. If one wants to opt out of light, he/she is free to choose darkness. That is what many did and do these days. During Jesus' time the elite class in the society, the scribes and Pharisees, opted out of the true light. That is why St. John warns the evil doers in these words, **“This is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because, their works were evil” (3:19).** So it is our sinful state which prevents us from coming to the light. That is why, right from the very beginning of his public ministry Jesus began to preach, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** Repentance for our sins will wipe out the darkness from us and then we will be able to receive the true light.

We Christians claim that we remain in the light. But we need to examine and see how much light do we have in us? **When we were baptized our parents were given a lighted candle and the priest said, “Receive the light and keep this light burning.”** Thus we received the true light. When we were young our parents may have done their best to keep that light shining in us. But when we grew up to be our own how much effort did we make or do we make to keep that light still shining in us? As parents, you need to ask of yourselves, how much effort did you make to give this light to your children? The same question should be asked by the pastors as how sincerely they try to impart the true light to their people.

In Matthew 5:14 Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. When Jesus says, ‘You are the light’ he means that we have to receive the light from Jesus and reflect the same in us so that those who are in darkness see it. Unless the parents play their role of helping the children to recognize the light, one day when they are of their own, they will walk in darkness. *So this is my appeal to all young parents, please, give the true light to your children by practicing your faith, so that your children may see your good examples and grow in faith.* Please encourage your children to come to the Eucharistic celebration and receive the light from it. Unfortunately these days we don't see many young parents in the church with their children. In the modern world more and more Christians prefer darkness to light and they don't know where they are heading towards and their children too are groping in darkness. Unless you and I try hard to preserve the true light for the next generation, the light will have disappeared from our children's life in no time and that will cause their spiritual death. Let us make them children of light; not the victims of the darkness.