

Commentary on the Readings for January 22, 2023

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Readings for today take a turn away from some of the familiar stories and give us some background on the beginning of Jesus' teachings. Did you ever wonder why Jesus started His teachings, His public ministry, in the northern part of Israel? Jerusalem in the south was the most important city at that time. Why didn't He start there? Nazareth and Capernaum were small hill towns in the north. Even Nathaniel, one of Jesus' first disciples, said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (*See John 1:46*) In ancient Israel, Nazareth was located in the land of Zebulun and Capernaum was in the Land of Naphtali. These were major crossroads of trade at one time, and the area was full of people from all over the world. Even the Jews of that region were more cosmopolitan and open to new ideas than the people of southern Israel (in the area of Jerusalem). So the readings for today tell us about being open to new ideas *particularly when they come from the Holy Spirit*.

In the **First Reading**, from the *Prophet Isaiah (8:23-9:3)*, we hear how God, through the Prophet, chastised the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali for their wickedness in abandoning God in favor of riches from trade. At the same time, He promises that if they turn away from their evil ways He will again shine a "great light upon them" and "they will rejoice as at the time of the harvest." Unfortunately, this did not happen in their lifetime because they refused to open their hearts and minds to God. We might say that when Jesus lived in the region, He was "the light." Unfortunately, they didn't accept Him either.

The **Responsorial Psalm (27:1-14)** is a prayer of hope and trust in God and His ways. Left to ourselves we would surely end up as the people of Zebulun and Naphtali did, enslaved by the enemy. This is a prayer that we should all say frequently.

The **Second Reading** is from *St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1:10-17)*. In this passage, Paul tells us that there are many people "out there" who seem to be intelligent or important in some way, and they demand our attention to follow them to riches and happiness. However, as John the Baptist does in today's readings and as St. Paul does in the "Second Reading," we should listen for the voice of God in Jesus Christ through scripture and the Holy Spirit. This is where the true "great light" will come from.

In the **Gospel Reading**, from the *Gospel of Matthew (4:12-23)*, we hear how Jesus chose to begin His ministry by selecting men from the northern regions who were open to new ideas and discussions. The people of the south, around Jerusalem, were too set in their ways, grounded in the Law of Moses and controlled by the teachings of the Pharisees.

Are we also too set in our ways to be open to Christ's calling us to something new or different in our life? So often we hear good church-going people say: "I'm not getting anything out of Mass," or "I don't know why I go to church. It is so repetitious and boring." Perhaps it is because they forget that worshipping means giving your time, your attention and your life to God and then listening for Him to speak to your heart. That is when it becomes exciting and that is when you will realize that you got "something out" of participating in the celebration of the Eucharist. Just something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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