

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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Hearing that John had been arrested, Jesus went back to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this way the prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled:

*'Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali!
Way of the sea on the far side of Jordan,
Galilee of the nations!
The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light;
on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death
a light has dawned.'*

From that moment Jesus began his preaching with the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And they left their nets at once and followed him. Going on from there he saw another pair of brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they were in their boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. At once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.

He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people.

(Matthew 4:12-23)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- When the people of Israel returned to the Promised Land after their liberation from Egypt, the land was divided among the twelve tribes descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of those sons.
- The town of Capernaum stood on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, on the border of the areas given to these two sons of Jacob.
- Matthew uses the term *kingdom of heaven* rather than *kingdom of God*. This may have been because his audience is largely Jewish, and Jews avoided using the sacred name of God.
- This is another example of Matthew stating that, in Jesus, the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's coming are fulfilled.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel tells of the first public actions of Jesus' ministry. It should be studied in conjunction with the first reading from Isaiah, which speaks of a light coming that breaks the 'bars', 'yokes' and 'rods' that bind people and weigh them down.

- What are the things that weigh you down at the moment?
- From what does our world need to be liberated?

This gospel reveals Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. John the Baptist, the precursor, has now left the scene, having been arrested, so Jesus takes up and completes his message of repentance because the kingdom is at hand. In the final verses, the manifestation of that kingdom is made apparent. People are healed and the Good News is proclaimed. The second part of this text shows the effectiveness of Jesus' message. His voice and his proclamation draw people from their labours to a new kind of work: cooperating in the task of drawing people to the truth of God's plan for the world.

- Explore the call of discipleship and what that means for people who follow Christ today. How are we called to 'come, follow me'?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What have you left behind to follow Jesus? How do you feel about that?
- Have you ever felt 'called' to do something: a challenge you just could not pass by? a strange urge to move beyond your normal behaviour, or to pursue something outside your experience? What was the outcome? Share your reflections.
- Try to be a light for other people this week. Be aware of opportunities through which you could draw other people to Christ.
- Use a part of today's psalm as your prayer this week:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation.
Whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
before whom shall I shrink?*

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Peter the fisherman was always considered to be the first among the apostles—that is, the twelve specially chosen followers of Jesus.

- Point out the difference between the many who were disciples and the Twelve.
- The primacy of Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, is carried on in the Church through the primacy of the Pope as Bishop of Rome and successor of Peter. One of the titles often given to the Pope is 'the fisherman', as in the book and film *The Shoes of the Fisherman*.
- Explain the structure of the hierarchical Church—with the Pope at its head, the College of Cardinals, the Synod of Bishops, local bishops' conferences, dioceses and individual parishes—and the unity that exists in the whole Church. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§880–887.)
- You could share a profile of the current successor of Peter, Pope Francis, highlighting his particular focus and witness as pope.
- You could introduce the teaching authority of the Church, or magisterium, and explain how that operates. You may need to deal with some sensitive issues of church teaching or the question of infallibility.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

St Cyril of Jerusalem offered the following reflection to catechumens around the year 380:

You now find yourself in the fishing nets of Christ.
Let yourselves be caught. Christ wants to capture you, not to kill you but to give you life out of death.

How does this speak to you as a catechumen today?

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Identify the ways in which your community reaches out to others as 'fishers of people'. This is part of the missionary and evangelising nature of the Church. Are there ways catechumens can bear witness to their own call to faith? What may they be able to teach others in your community who were born into the Church?
- You could use images of fish or boats as a focus for prayer. A suitable song could be 'The Galilee Song' (As *One Voice* 5). Pray for each other, for strength on the journey as you leave your old life behind to follow Jesus. Pray for all those involved in a ministry of drawing new followers to Christ. Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in the *RCIA* at §94E.

NOTES

Dotted lines for taking notes.