

HOMILY by Fr. Anthony Davis

“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.”

January 26, 2020

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Is 8:23--9:3; 1 Cor 1:10-13,17; Mt 4:12-23

Light and darkness: Terry Anderson, a journalist for the Associated Press, was seized and held hostage in Lebanon for seven years; blindfolded almost all of that time, Anderson described his experience in this way, “Deepest darkness, fumbling, uncertainties are frightening. More frightening is the darkness of the mind, when outside light makes no impression and inner lights go dim”.

MESSAGE: In the Holy Scriptures, light and darkness serve as symbols for good and evil. In today’s first reading and in the Gospel, Jesus is presented as the One sent to remove the darkness of sin from the world. Through Isaiah, God promises that His people will see an end to the darkness of oppression and separation. In other words, today’s Scripture readings tell us that Christ has brought us into the Light (4:16), by calling us to repentance (4:17).

The first reading contains the prophetic reference to Christ as the Light that dispels darkness. Matthew wanted his readers to recognize that the Light Isaiah spoke of had finally appeared with the coming of Jesus. Add to this, he tells us that the people to whom Jesus brought his ministry had been sitting in darkness, but that Jesus’ coming had brought them a great Light. Thus, the refrain for today’s Resp. Psalm (Ps 27) has us sing, “The Lord is my Light and my Salvation”, and its verse reminds us that with Him as our “life’s refuge,” we need fear no earthly power or threat.

SUMMARY: Jesus used exactly the same words John the Baptist had used: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." 'Repent' usually means to be sorry for or to regret some wrong actions we have done in the past. Jesus, however, is asking for much more than that. The call is not just to be sorry for past sins and to avoid them in the future. It is a call for a change of direction from now on and into the future, a right about turn from sin to God. The Greek word for repent is 'metanoia,' which implies a radical change in one’s thinking. It means looking at life in a completely new way. It is only when we begin to make this radical change that we begin to become part of that Kingdom and God starts ruling our lives.

When we come before God confessing, "I can't do better," then we are dying to self. We are giving up control of our lives. We are throwing our sinful lives on the mercy of God. We are inviting God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves -- namely to raise the dead -- to change and re-create us. "Repent" is in the present tense -- "Keep on repenting!" "Continually be repentant!" Repentance is the ongoing lifestyle of the people in the kingdom.

Conclusion: That’s why today St. Paul argues that we the people of God who live in the Light must avoid divisions and rivalries, because Christ cannot be divided; nor can his message be changed to suit its hearers. Therefore, we need to heal all divisions in our community so we will be able to bear united witness to the Lord, and effectively introduce Christ’s Light into the darkness of prejudice, war, abuse, social injustice, hunger, poverty, ignorance, greed, anger, vengeance, and apathy.

And so, let’s heed the call of Christ to "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near."