

## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

Isa 8:23b-9:3

Ps 27:1, 4, 13,14

I Cor 1:10-13,17

Matt 4:12-23

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It is the end of January, and we've officially begun a new semester. With a long break behind us, it seems we have nothing to look forward to, but homework, papers and exams. We have now entered the dark months of winter, and I'm told winter stays a bit longer up here than what I am used to "down South." It's tempting for us to want to hibernate. We cannot bear to think about being outside, except for the moments when we have to — to run to class, to get a bite to eat in the Campus Center, or even to walk clear across campus all the way to the Church! The thought of even leaving the Church tonight has me cold! We seek a sign of Spring — any sign, even a small one — a light at the end of the tunnel.

Many times in life we find ourselves in moments like this one, where we long for a light at the end of the tunnel, yet we see no end in sight. Our lives can get so bogged down by details, by routine, or even overwork, that we lose sense of a bigger picture, a sense of purpose. It is a type of darkness — a darkness in need of light.

Parts of our world right now are in varying degrees of darkness. Natural disasters like the terrible tsunami in Asia, like the mudslides in California, cause us to look for light, to look for hope. Continued war torn areas of our world, especially in Iraq, cause us to question when the end will be near. We look for light. We look for hope.

What we hear in today's readings is that the light is already among us, that hope is here. Isaiah tells us that "the people who walked in darkness have already seen a great light," that "upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." We hear not about darkness, but about light. The darkness is clearly in the past. Matthew takes this text and tells us and his community that in the person of Jesus the light has come into the dark world.

These readings are consoling and hope-filled indeed, but we cannot help but see a disconnect. If the light has come into the world, why can't we see it? If the light has shone, then why hasn't our darkness faded? Certainly the gospel is filled with good news, but we may be tempted to think that this good news is not for us.

Ah, but it is for us! Even more, it is *in* us. The challenge of today's gospel is not to look outside for the light, but to look within, to look inside ourselves. At our baptism, our Godparents received a candle in our name that symbolized the light of Christ. At baptism, the light of Christ is passed on and spread to the newest members of the Christian community, whose task it is to carry on the mission of Christ. When we received the light, that was our initial response to Jesus' invitation to follow him, just as Peter and Andrew responded in the gospel today.

My brothers and sisters, the light that the world is so desperately looking for is within us, for, as members of Christ's Body, the Church, *we are Christ in the world*. Christ works in and through each one of us, and Christ continues to invite us to come after him. The more we are aware of this, and the more we work together and unite as Christ's Body, the brighter our light

will be in a not-so-dark-world-after-all.

The darkness caused by disasters like the tsunami fades when we respond in the best way we can — through our prayers for victims and their families, and, perhaps, through our monetary contributions to rescue efforts. The darkness of war fades — no matter where the war takes place — when we work toward peace in our families, in our friendships, in our dorms. The darkness of long winters, of routine, and of overwhelming busy-ness fades when we stand in solidarity with those around us experiencing similar struggles, with the poor and homeless who really have to endure the cold, when we are compassionate to people on campus we might not normally acknowledge.

That is why Isaiah and Matthew tell us that the darkness isn't as dark any more. That is why the people have already seen a great light. Our lives and our world are very much a part of the light, and that *is* good news.