

THE HOMILY FOR THIS 3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jesus Dispels the Darkness of our Lives

The People who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:3).

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus, the Son of God brought life and light to a world sitting in the darkness of sin. How? He did this through his teaching, his healing and ultimately his passion, death on the cross and resurrection. Jesus brought a newness of love and a new beginning. This newness of love is God in human flesh.

The experience of Naphatali and Zebulun is an example (or a microcosm) of what happened to the whole world. These men were in utter darkness and degradation but Christ came into their lands and dispelled the darkness. In our readings this Sunday, Naphatali and Zebulun are mentioned in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah and the Gospel according to St Matthew. Who are Naphtali and Zebulun? What is their story?

Naphtali and Zebulun were among the twelve sons of Jacob. From these sons, together with the rest of their brothers came twelve tribes and cities. Naphtali was the second son of Bilhah,

Rachael's maid, born to Jacob at the Rachael's request. Rachael was Jacob's favorite wife. The name Naphatali derives from the Hebrew "*naptule Elohim niptalti*," meaning in a divine wrestling match I have wrestled (Genesis 30:8). Rachael was competing with her sister Leah, the other wife of Jacob in having babies. Towards the end of his life, Jacob, the father of Naphtali, Zebulun, and their brothers, blessed Naphtali saying, "Naphtali is a hind let loose, which brings forth lovely fawns (Genesis 49:21).

Zebulun on the hand was the sixth son born to Jacob by Leah. At Zebulun's birth his mother exclaimed, "God has brought me a precious gift"(Genesis 30:20). This new born child was named Zebulun. The name Zebulun is related to an Akkadian word , *zubullum*, bridegroom's gift. Zebulun like the rest of his brothers was also blessed by Jacob. The blessing Jacob pronounced on him was "Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore; he will be a haven for ships, and his flank shall rest on Sidon" (Genesis 49:13).

In other words, he will be like Memphis, San Francisco, New York, or Venice. The cities by the sea are often wealthy because of the trade fostered by the sea routes. The mountainous part of Naphtali was also designated a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7).

Another significant lot shared by Naphatali and Zebulun was that when they had grown into large tribes they were the first to be invaded by Assyrians during the time of the Syro-Ephraimite War of 735-732 B.C. Originally, Naphatali and Zebulun were part of the Northern kingdom of Israel. "The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III"

took them from Israel and forcefully incorporated them into the Assyrian province of Dor (2 Kgs 15:29). They lost the purity of their Jewish identity because they were mixed with people of pagan nations. Lacking the light which faith in God gives and being deprived of their cultural identity, they were considered people who dwelt in darkness and distress. They knew shame, sorrow and misery.

Yet our Lord began his ministry in Naphtali and Zebulun, these so-called degraded and devastated territories. Among the mysteries of God is that he always reaches out to the least of his people. He chooses what is considered contemptible in the eyes of the world to shame the self-styled wise. "God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something" (1 Corinthians 1:28). Evident in our Lord's gesture the consoling message that no matter how heavy the burden you carry the Lord can reach out and lift it up from your shoulders. It also says the message our God is Almighty, he can turn defeats into victories. The occasion that led to his bringing great light to those who dwelled in darkness was the imprisonment of John the Baptist. God is a master in bringing good out of bad situations. Are you facing any bad situation in your life right now? Give it over to Jesus. In Him, anguish takes wing and flies away, darkness vanishes.

Sometimes, you encounter // some // people who think that the world WOULD //will// be better without religion and without God. What do you think? What you discover is that SOME //such// people's concept of religion is far from what religion is REALLY about. They think of religion //as that which // divides, pits one against the other, fosters violence against //human beings especially // the most vulnerable. Religion in its true sense binds us in a covenant of love to God , who is love, and to one another. True religion makes us want to embrace one another as brothers and sisters under GOD. The language of true religion is "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Religion helps defend the vulnerable, the weak and THE defenseless. This includes the// unborn babies. It helps us to advocate for the poor, embrace the culture of life and the brotherhood of all men and women. . without this the world is on the brink of disaster. Some people think of God as the figment of the human mind" But God is God" . He is the ground of our existence. He is our Maker, Redeemer, Sanctifier and Father. He is love. We need God. Without God the world would be immersed in the utter darkness of hate, selfishness, violence, hopelessness and degradation. Jesus came to deliver us from these. He is our light and salvation.

