

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Matt 4:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 4:12-23; L67A

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested,
he withdrew to Galilee.

He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light,
on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death
light has arisen.*

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,
Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew,
casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.

He said to them,
“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

At once they left their nets and followed him.

He walked along from there and saw two other brothers,
James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.

*Continued in Appendix A, p. 267, or
Matt 4:12-17 in Appendix A, p. 267.*

Reflecting on the Gospel

Though it's the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, we now begin reading from the Gospel of Matthew. Last week of course we read from the Gospel of John. But liturgically we are in Cycle A, when we read mostly from Matthew, also known as “the church's Gospel.” Matthew gives us so many familiar passages, and critical passages as well, that it might be difficult to imagine the church without the influence of this gospel. In fact, this gospel is the only one even to use the word “church.” Even more, the version of the “our Father” that we pray comes from Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount with the eight Beatitudes is in Matthew. Jesus' promise to build the church on the rock that is Peter, is in Matthew.

And as Matthew used Mark as a source, he seems to have reproduced nearly

all of his gospel, about 600 of the 661 verses by the count of most scholars. Because nearly all of Mark is found in Matthew, Matthew became the favored gospel between the two. Why read the shorter version (Mark) when the longer one essentially included Mark and much more?

Today, in the story of the call of the first disciples, we see an example of Matthew lengthening the stories that he inherited from Mark. He introduces the story by explaining that Jesus withdrew to Galilee upon learning that John had been arrested.

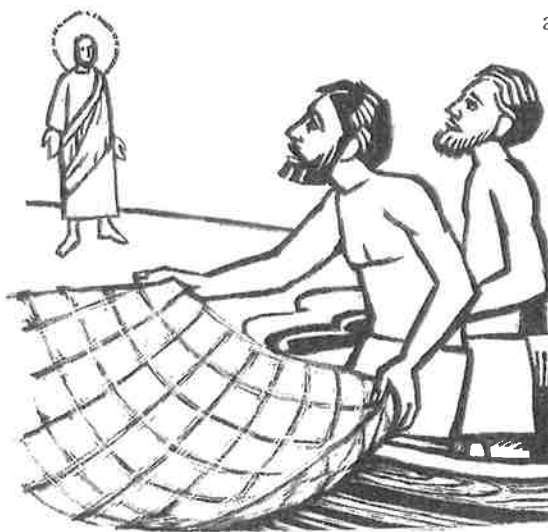
Matthew tells us that this fulfilled Scripture. Mark says no such thing. Further, Matthew tells us that Jesus went to live in Capernaum, as though he might have had a house there. This seems to be a story of a young man striking out on his own after leaving the small town he called home.

The remainder of the story, with the calling of the two sets of brothers, generally follows Mark. But this example demonstrates how Matthew has made the story “better.” He gives a rationale for Jesus' withdrawal into Galilee, into Capernaum. And this move actually fulfills Scripture in the eyes of Matthew. As we continue to read from Matthew this liturgical year, we will pay close attention to some unique elements of his theological insight.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Jesus called the disciples near the beginning of his ministry. And he called them two by two, the brothers Simon and Andrew, and James and John. These were fishermen, in some ways the ancient equivalent of today's highly skilled blue-collar workers. They worked with their hands, as even the “mending their nets” indicates. At the invitation of Jesus, they all leave behind their way of life to follow him.

Modern calls to discipleship are scarcely so dramatic. But the imagery presented in Matthew speaks to us when we imagine putting away prior commitments that tend to disintegrate in the face of an invitation from Jesus. We may hear the same call to put aside the tedious, monotonous, quotidian activities that mark our lives and enter into a new relationship with him. This relationship will



ultimately lead to a putting away of our entire selves, a dying to ourselves, so that we might rise with him. And that is the paschal mystery. At this, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we hear the call to follow him to the point of forsaking our very selves. In so doing, we will be raised to new life with him.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

To the point: Today's gospel begins with Jesus hearing the news of John the Baptist's arrest and responding by leaving the region of Judea where John's ministry was located to return to Galilee. In John the Baptist's life, Jesus would have seen the risks and dangers of his mission lived out. As the forerunner of the Lord, John preaches repentance and suffers his own martyrdom at the hands of a corrupt person fearful of what this preaching demanded of him in his own life. While it might seem like Jesus is retreating, this is not the case and in Capernaum his words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," echo the exact refrain of John when he began preaching in the desert of Judea (Matt 3:2).

Connecting the Gospel

to the second reading: In the second reading St. Paul chides the Corinthians for the divisions that threaten to splinter their fledgling Christian community. And he points to the source of their unity, Christ. It is telling that the first action Jesus makes after proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is at hand is to recruit followers. These disciples will help him as they become "fishers of men." Eventually, it will be up to this group of close friends to take on the work of spreading the good news of God's kingdom to every nation of the earth. They are only able to do it through the power of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Christian family.

to experience: At times, we can become focused on the personal aspects of faith, but both Jesus and Paul remind us that we are not saved by ourselves; we are saved in community, as the Body of Christ, called to be one.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Imagery of light echoes throughout the first reading, the gospel, and the responsorial psalm. We sing together, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." What does this mean? How is Jesus like a light for us? Isaiah gives us a clue when he prophesies, "The people who walked in darkness / have seen a great light." There is an immense difference between trying to walk in darkness and walking in light. In darkness we are unaware of where our steps are taking us or what dangers and obstacles might be in our path. In the gospel these words of the prophet are changed slightly to tell us, "[T]he people who were in darkness have seen a great light / on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death / light has arisen." To sit in darkness conjures an image of hopelessness and despair. We are consumed by the darkness that covers us and see no way of escape. Within this state it is easy to see how one might become "overshadowed by death," a term that could mean despair or loss of hope and joy.

to psalmist preparation: How do you experience Jesus as "light" and "salvation"?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The psalm for today proclaims, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; / whom should I fear?" Where does fear most often creep into your life? How might you hand that fear over to God?

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul chides the community for the rivalries and dissensions that threaten to tear it apart. How does your parish community deal with divisions and disagreements? How might God be calling your parish to grow in this area?

The symbolism of light and darkness is highlighted in today's first reading and gospel passage, and indeed, all throughout the sacred Scriptures. When you consider light and darkness, what images spring to mind? How do these images help you to understand Jesus and salvation history?

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 26, 2020

Gospel (cont.)

Matt 4:12-23; L67A

They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him. He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.