

HOMILY SUNDAY 03 – YEAR A
“Repent, and Spread The Good News”
(Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 17-18; Mt 4:12-23)

As part of their training as facilitators in Morley, Alberta, for the *Returning To Spirit* program the facilitator, Mark Pizandawac, had the participants close their eyes while he repeated the words: “Ever since you were born, all you ever wanted was to be appreciated, acknowledged and accepted.”

My brothers and sisters, our mission is to spread the Good News, the Light of Christ.

The simple training exercise above was striking and effective because it touches on an eternal human need – to be loved - and on an eternal human dilemma – we never seem to be loved enough. So often, we crave love, and are loved, yet feel unloved. Some of us are so hurt and wary that we even push away love when it is offered to us. At one point in my life, my sister-in-law felt compelled to tell me, “Sylvain, you are afraid to love and to be loved.” And looking back, I must admit now that at that time, she was right.

The Good News of the gospel is that we are loved, totally and unconditionally, by our God in Jesus Christ. The reading from Isaiah is the familiar one from the Christmas readings: “A great light has shone in deep darkness.” More, that light has overcome all the power of that darkness. Sin; sinfulness; our defects of character, the power of addiction is all overcome, broken, vanquished. This is a source of great joy for all humanity.

The Psalm adds that God is light, salvation, stronghold, and goodness. And in the gospel we meet that light, that gentle power, in person – Jesus of Nazareth, the one who fulfilled the prophecies about Zebulun and Naphtali. In his own quiet way, Jesus proclaims those most beautiful of all words – “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” In him, the very reign of God has overtaken us, is upon us, upon those who believe, those who would follow him.

The key is in the word “repent.” This amazing new reality that begins so humbly among us that it is hardly noticeable, calls for a response of faith that is a transformation. The brothers Simon and Andrew are models for us. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. So too are the other brothers James and John, mending their nets. They too, left the boat and their father, and followed him.

The Greek word for “repent” is *metanoia*. It has the connotation of “turning around”, of going in an entirely new direction. This is what Jesus asks of us. We are to believe in him with our whole beings, trust him completely, and let go of anything in our lives that might hinder us from placing him first before any other person or thing. This is radical grace calling for a radical response of faith.

St. Paul in the second reading is another model for us. Not long ago my spiritual director, Sr. Teresita Keimbeitz OSU, returned from a sabbatical tour called "Following the footsteps of St. Paul." She returned having been struck anew by how St. Paul met Jesus, encountered Jesus, fell in love with Jesus, on the road to Damascus. That encounter changed his life, his whole person, his belief system, his behavior. He was never the same again, for he had fallen in love with Jesus. He heard the voice of Jesus calling him by name, and identifying himself with those Paul was persecuting. And he was struck blind for three days, three days of inner transformation during which Paul was able to absorb this life-changing experience and emerge, like a butterfly out of a cocoon, to a totally new reality.

The intensity of that experience rings out clearly in the words he uses in the second reading. "Christ sent me not to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power." For Paul can now proclaim with utter confidence, from his own experience, the power of that Word of God that is the power of the Cross, the power that saves us from all darkness, from all sin. All we have to do is follow his example – believe and repent, trust in the Lord and surrender our lives to him.

John Peter Flett from St. Theresa Point is someone who is like St. Paul. He grew up in an alcoholic environment, and suffered much as a young person. His own son was murdered by his daughter-in-law when under the influence of alcohol. Yet he is today a peaceful man, a reconciler, one who teaches others how to let go and forgive as a facilitator in the Returning To Spirit program. All who hear his story are amazed at the power of God at work in this man. This is the power of the Cross.

The Eucharist that we share now is a sacred meal that makes the light and love of Christ present to us; heals us, and sends us out to be light to others.

So, have faith in Jesus, the light of the world. Repent, and then spread the Good News, the Light of Christ, to others.