

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 9:1-4
1 Cor 1:10-13, 17
Mt 4:12-17

Novelists, poets, students and even preachers have been known to stare at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen with no clue how to begin their project. Jesus also had to figure out when, and how, He was to begin His ministry.

Today's gospel tells us that it was John the Baptist's imprisonment that was the trigger for Jesus, but where was His base camp to be? In choosing Capernaum He was announcing who He was to the world. In our first reading we learn that Isaiah links God's promised Messiah to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the region north of Jerusalem where Capernaum is located.

In Isaiah's time, the people of God were evil and corrupt so much so that Isaiah prophesied that they would be destroyed. Even so, there would be a remnant of faithful people who would become God's new people because they were obedient to His will. The king of this new people would be wise and his kingdom would never be destroyed. By basing Himself in Capernaum, Jesus is indicating that He is God's chosen One who is the light to the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel.

Jesus began His mission by reiterating the message of John the Baptist, so maintaining a continuity with him. Jesus urged the people to repent. Repentance is not feeling sorry or grovelling with remorse. It means recognising that something is wrong and taking action to put it right. This is rather like closing the open glass doors at the back of the church when the aircons are on bashing their brains out combatting the heat or cold coming through the doors.

If God is not the priority in our lives, we will waste a lot of effort before we recognise that we are off track. The level of our commitment to Jesus is measured by how willing we are to make a corrective change of direction in our life when we need to. Words and good intentions are all very well, but it is action that counts. After all, it is said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Students of Jewish Law chose their teachers and often changed them. In contrast, Jesus chose His disciples and expects commitment and holy obedience, not just respect, from them. St Paul had this problem with the Corinthian Christians who had split into factions, following human leaders instead of being obedient to Jesus. There is no place for personality cults or factionalism in the Catholic Church. We must leave that to the secular political world.

If we want to re-order our life's priorities, where do we begin? In his book, 'The Power of Silence,' Cardinal Sarah says that the Mass is the re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and this is where we must begin. Our worship can only draw us closer to God if we

meet God in stillness and silence. If the mass we attend is noisy, busy and full of activity, the focus will be on the community of worshippers, and not on God.

Worship that regards God as a 'mate,' cannot foster intimacy with Him. Cardinal Sarah warns us that if we worship God with noisy hearts it means we are self-focussed. And then, how can we listen to God if we cannot listen to each other and offer our prayers as a community in unity? We are doing well, but we have to avoid being sprinters and gallopers who rush, clip or shrink words in prayers, or sing as if we are either singing the patter song from a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, or a solemn funereal dirge.

Our worship is to focus on God, not on ourselves. Nor is it to be entertainment or a rally. If it is any of these things we will leave mass with noisier hearts than when we came. We must leave in stillness and silence so others can continue their prayers.

It is no accident that the Psalmist tells us to, 'wait thou still upon God' (Ps 62:5) The Psalmist doesn't mean we should still wait for God, or be like a waiter or waitress to Him, but wait in silence, inner stillness and openness of heart for Him to act. Why? Because our hope is in him (Ps 62:5).

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