

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Let me begin with some historical and geographical background. In the first reading we hear about Zebulun and Naphtali. They are actually people, they were the 6th and 10th sons of Jacob and the area that Isaiah is speaking about is where they settled. Both areas are around the sea of Galilee, Zebulun which is in the south and is where Nazareth is located (where Jesus grew up) and Naphtali which is in the northern part of Galilee which contains Capernaum, where Jesus will begin his ministry. Isaiah speaks about the Lord degrading the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. You might ask, what does that mean. In simple terms it means that when the people of Israel rebelled against God years before Isaiah's prophecy, God would turn them and their land over to the Assyrians. The Jewish people would be suppressed and suffered.

I think that it is important to note these things because it is where Jesus will begin his ministry. In the Gospel we hear that John the Baptist has been arrested and will eventually be martyred. John has been the forerunner for Jesus, has gone before him, but no longer. Jesus will now begin his ministry and pick Capernaum in the land of Naphtali, (which was called the Galilee of the gentiles because it was largely populated by gentiles). He will not go to the land of Zebulun to make his home base because Nazareth is there and as you know he was not really welcomed there after he had grown up.

It is in Capernaum that he will preach the kingdom of God, will heal the paralytic man that was lowered through the roof into the synagogue, restore sight to the blind, heal a dumb man possessed by the devil, cured the servant of the centurion, healed the woman who had been bleeding for many years when she touched the fringe of his coat or raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. And yet with all of this, many will reject him, challenging him every step of the way.

The people who are in darkness, (as we have heard about) were the people of Israel who have been oppressed, but as some scholars have stated, because of their unbelief in Jesus, the light, the great light which is Christ will also be given to the gentiles. And so it begins, the kingdom of God is present and the light of Christ is there for all.

Now that you have some what of a sense of the geography of the area, picture Jesus now walking along the sea of Galilee choosing his first disciples to help him spread his message. We hear of him coming upon Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew and James and John. He said to them, come after me and I will make you fishers of men. At once they left their nets and followed him. Following someone can encompass many things. Trust is certainly a big thing, obedience possibly, agreement on what the person stands for and so on. But I want to talk about one thing today that I feel is important as a follower of Christ. That is this concept of looking back, looking back at our lives.

When the disciples leave their nets (as we hear about) keep in mind that the nets really refer to everything that they have, including material things, relationships; everything. But perhaps there is even more to leaving their nets behind, it is leaving themselves behind, it is leaving their past behind. There is a wonderful article written by a Brother Geoffrey Tristram that speaks exactly about this particular thing when it comes to following Christ. He writes: Our past can have a real power over us: perhaps something in our past fills us with guilt or regret; something we just can't shake off and which we carry as a burden; perhaps a broken relationship, or something we did which we know was wrong. Christ longs to take that burden from us. He longs to set us free so that we can look forward and follow him. Reconciliation with ourselves and with God means learning to look ahead, to keep our eyes on the path in front of us, where we find Christ always

leading us onwards. We cannot keep pace with the Risen Christ who goes before us if we are encumbered with guilt. Imagine Jesus walking ahead of you and saying, Come on!

It is a continual struggle for so many of us I believe. We keep looking back and yet that is not the christian message. Events in our past can prevent us from having a closer relationship with God. The gospel is a message of freedom. I would only ask you today to consider how much of your nets are you willing to leave behind to follow the one who St Bernard wrote: he who is altogether desirable, upon whom not the people only, but the holy angels themselves desire to look.