

HOMILY - Third Sunday - Ordinary Time Cycle A - Jan 22, 2017

Is 8: 23- 9:3; 1 Cor: 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4: 12-23

For many of us it's been a busy week: On Monday, Jan 16th, we celebrated the birth of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr and prayed for the end of racial discrimination in housing, employment, education and especially in our country's prison system. Wednesday we began the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a week in which we've prayed that "we all may be one," not only for the unity of Christians, but for the Evangelization of Peoples and for Persecuted Christians throughout the world. On Fri, Jan 20th, Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as the forty-fifth President of our country, and then, on Saturday, Jan 21st, hundreds of thousands of women gathered in Washington as well as in major cities around the country, in a kind of "counter-inauguration" protest.

So it's comforting to be able to sum up our readings from Isaiah, Corinthians and Matthew: "We have seen a great light: Jesus, the Messiah, who heals us of our sins, and who is our unity and peace."

But after speaking to some retreatants about discipleship, we all agreed that there seems to be a misunderstanding about being called and leaving everything behind. Although the gospel says that the first four disciples left their occupation of fishing in order to follow Jesus, this kind of "leaving behind" was not, and still is not, required of all, even though we are all called. For most people, it is in the ordinary events of daily life that salvation unfolds. For most people, this is precisely where they are to function as disciples.

True disciples of Jesus are called to leave behind certain ways of living as they follow him. They are called AWAY from lives of pettiness and division. They are called away from the kind of factionalism that seems to have threatened the unity of the Corinthian community and is threatening the unity of our Church and country today. They are called away from narrow-mindedness and mean-spirited competition. They are called away from claiming that their interpretation of the gospel message is the only interpretation. It is in fact much easier to leave one's nets than to leave the web of one's prejudices. This is the darkness out of which disciples are called. We must leave behind our inclination to take sides, to pit one religious position against another, to dismiss as disloyal or narrow-minded those who understand our common faith in quite different ways than we do. True discipleship calls us AWAY from such points of view.

But what are we called TO? True disciples of Jesus are called to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, whether that be in a monastery or in the circumstances of everyday life. We are all called to heal the broken-hearted, to alleviate the yoke that burdens others. We are all called to work for Christian unity and world peace, even in the midst of diversity and misunderstanding, or, perhaps we should say, precisely in the midst of diversity and misunderstanding. Disciples are called to respect the struggles, sincerity and commitment of everyone ... to dignify and assist those who, in any way, are considered "other," because they happen to be "different" than we are ... and are bullied and victimized because of their race, religion or sexuality. Disciples are called to be a light in a world of darkness and gloom.

And so, as a true disciple of Christ, Pope Francis sent the following congratulatory message to President Donald Trump on Friday, telling the new president that the global stature of the United States will be measured “by its concern for the poor, the outcast and those in need.”

Here’s the full text of Pope Francis’ brief message ... a message we all need to hear:

TO: The Honorable Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, The White House, Washington, D.C.

“Upon your inauguration as the forty-fifth President of the United States of America, I offer you my cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you wisdom and strength in the exercise of your high office. At a time when our human family is beset by grave humanitarian crises demanding farsighted and united political responses, I pray that your decisions will be guided by the rich spiritual and ethical values that have shaped the history of the American people and your nation’s commitment to the advancement of human dignity and freedom worldwide. Under your leadership, may America’s stature continue to be measured above all by its concern for the poor, the outcast and those in need who, like Lazarus, stand before our door. With these sentiments, I ask the Lord to grant you and your family, and all the beloved American people, his blessings of peace, concord and every material and spiritual prosperity.”

FRANCISCUS PP _____END