

## **HOMILY for SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A**

This Sunday's First Reading talks about being the light to the nations. As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded of this cute story I would like to share with you.

One day a man spotted a lamp by the roadside. He picked it up, rubbed it vigorously and a genie appeared.

"I'll grant you your fondest wish," the genie said.

The man thought for a moment, then said, "I want a spectacular job – a job that no man has ever succeeded at or has ever attempted to do."

"Poof!" said the genie. "You're a housewife."

I'm sure all men would have a chance to shine their light to the whole world with that awesome job! Anyway, this Sunday the Church celebrates the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time & welcomes us back to our normal, boring life routines. Here is the message that prophet Isaiah wants to share with us in today's First Reading. He tells us, "The Lord said to me: You are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory... And I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord, & my God is now my strength! It is too little, He says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, & restore the survivors of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations; & my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Evidently the Lord promised to show His glory through Israel. We just witnessed how He did it at Christmas by sending His Son Jesus to Bethlehem & letting His glory shine on the shepherds of Israel in a dark night two centuries ago. Then, they were able to experience that light at close-up in the manger. But, that is not all the Lord would do for Israel. He promised to be its strength & restore it after many painful years of slavery. He would help it rebuild & shine to the whole world. That wish came true last Sunday as the Magi from the East saw the glorious star & followed it to the manger in Bethlehem. That is how the Lord wants Israel to become & then bring lots of blessings to the whole world in the future.

Since childhood, one of the favorite things I love to do is to get my hands on a book & spend some time to enjoy it. I like to discover all the mysteries in the book or learn new things about a different culture or a strange region of the world. I love to hear about incredible things that a hero might do for his/her community or someone who would fight evil power & help out the lowly. Those inspiring stories gave me encouragement in my daily life & challenged me to do the same & make our world a better place. I recall how difficult it was for me to find a book back in Viet Nam because the Communist government did not allow free speech & availability of information. But, I managed to find some inspiring stories of heroes in the Bible & several books that I could get my hands on. The reason I tell you about all of that is because those stories share similar message in today's First Reading. In my eyes, those heroes reflected the light of goodness to the nations & inspired me to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. They taught me the importance of making personal sacrifices for the sake of the community. They encouraged me to do more good things for the human family & limit the number of bad acts being done to others. They helped me develop a caring personality & work toward a compassionate virtue as a Christian. They inspired me to work hard at everything in life & not give up when encountering life challenges. They showed me how to be grateful to my benefactors & why I need to do more good deeds every day. For that is how I can be the light to the nations & help out many people as possible every day.

One of my personal heroes in the Bible is John the Baptist. For me, he truly reflected the light to the nations & helped bring salvation to the ends of the earth by his own spiritual way. He was a man of principle who wanted the best for the people of God & called them back home to God. He spoke against the lifestyle of King Herod & was not afraid to pay a heavy price for it. He was faithful to his Jewish tradition & tried to live up to its expectations. He fulfilled his mission of preparing the way of the Messiah & pointed people to Jesus. Today's Gospel tells us how John was the light to nations as following, "When John caught sight of Jesus coming toward him, he exclaimed: 'Look there! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! It is he of whom I said: 'After me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me.'"' Evidently John helped reflect the light to the nations by pointing people to the source of the light, namely, Jesus. The shepherds saw that light on Christmas night in the form of the angel of the Lord & a multitude of the heavenly hosts & followed it to the manger in Bethlehem. Later on, the Magi from the East spotted a strange star in the sky & followed that light to its source at the manger in Bethlehem. So, John was right to point the world to Jesus the light of the world. We can be like John & try to point many people to Jesus as possible.

Another way that John was able to guide people to Jesus the light of the world was by his own spiritual way. He was faithful to his Jewish tradition & was able to stand up against bad influences like King Herod. He was not afraid to define his own spirituality & entered the desert to get connected to God. He called people to turn away from their former way of life & come home to God. Most importantly, he was willing to make lots of personal sacrifices for that mission, including sacrificing his own life. Because of his integrity & faithfulness to God & Jewish tradition, the people respected John & followed him in great number. But, he did not let his popularity & fame get him to act arrogant. Rather, he was able to use it to guide more people to Jesus who is the light of the world. He is a great example for us to imitate & help share the light of Jesus with the world. We can learn to be kind & compassionate with others. We can try to bring healing & peace to the world wherever we go. That is how we can reflect the light of Jesus & bring His salvation to the ends of the earth.

My dear brothers & sisters, our dark & broken world sure needs the light of Jesus to show it the way to true peace & happiness. A lot of people also want to be healed in body, mind, & spirit these days. If we can reach out & help one of those people find healing somehow, we would have brought the salvation of Christ to that household. If we can brighten up the day for someone, we would have reflected the light of Jesus on that family. That is how we are called to do as Christians & make our world a better place. How can you reflect the light of Jesus to the nations in this New Year?