

## **HOMILY for 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A**

This Sunday's readings talk about being the light to the nations and people who walk in darkness. As I ponder on that message, I'm reminded of this favorite cute story of mine that I'd like to share with you.

An old couple, George & Myrtle, were waiting to see the doctor. George was called in first for his physical, & once the doctor had finished, he sent George back out into the waiting room & called for Myrtle.

"Before we proceed with the examination, I would like to have a quick word with you about your husband," said the doctor.

"Oh no, it's his heart, isn't it?" Myrtle said.

"No, no. Physically, George is doing just fine," the doctor replied. "It's his mental state that I'm concerned about."

"What do you mean?" Myrtle asked.

"Well, I asked him how he was feeling & he told me that he felt great. Then, he said that when he gets up at night to go to the bathroom, he opens the door & God turns on the light for him. When he's finished, he shuts the door & God turns the light off!"

"Son of a gun!" Myrtle cried. "The old fool's been peeing in the fridge again!"

Anyway, in Advent time we learned that Prophet Isaiah invited King Ahaz of Israel to ask for a sign from above in the form of the Immanuel, namely, "God is with us" amidst a dark & uncertain time for the people of God. The king refused to ask for a sign & continued to depend on the Empire Assyria for protection & security instead. Meanwhile, the Empire continued to oppress the people of Israel, loot them, & tax them to death. Israel was also divided into north & south. Prophet Isaiah hoped that a new king from the line of King David would arrive in Jerusalem to reunify Israel & set the people of God free from the oppression of the Assyrians. Today's First Reading expresses prophet Isaiah's hope as following, "... Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: For there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy & great rejoicing." So, who are the people who walked in darkness? Why couldn't they get out of darkness & have a normal life? And who would bring them a great light & help them to rejoice again?

When I think about people who walk in darkness, the people of Ukraine or those who suffer from a war or the oppression of another country come to mind. We have seen how the people of Ukraine have had to live in darkness literally & suffer terribly in their one-year-old war with Russia. They do not have electricity, heat, water, food, medicine, & other basic necessities in this cold winter. They have had to endure constant missile attacks by the Russians & inhumane treatments by their invaders. They do not know if they might be alive the next day or how their future would look like. These people are constantly living in darkness & hopelessness.

Another group of people who walk in darkness are the ones who have to deal with division or some kind of broken relationships. If we have gone through a broken relationship with a family member or a friend, we would have suffered a painful breakup & a dark period of our lives. That breakup sure has turned our world upside down & caused all kinds of problems in our lives. Or, if we have to face with some sort of division in our community, we would endure lots of internal fighting & hopeless future. We would suffer from all the arguing & constant fighting. Paul realized the potential darkness & destruction that division can cause to a community & wanted to caution the people of God in Corinth. In today's Second Reading, he warned, "I beg you, brothers, in the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ to agree in what you say. Let there be no factions; rather, be united in mind & judgment. I have been informed, my brothers, by certain members of Chloe's household that you are quarreling among yourselves. This is what I mean: One of you will say, 'I belong to Paul;' another, 'I belong to Apollos;' still another, 'Cephas has my allegiance;' & the fourth, 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided into parts? Was it Paul who was crucified for you?" We can only imagine all the fighting & hurt that the Corinthians had to endure as they walked through the dark nights of division. That is another example of what it means to be in darkness.

Another group of people who walk in darkness are the ones who have lost their loved ones & had to say farewell to them for good. They have to endure sadness of separation & the pain of loss. That loss is so painful & stressful that they feel like they have been through a dark night of the soul. They lose interest in their daily activities & have no zest for life. They cannot concentrate on the tasks at hand or enjoy their daily blessings. Even Jesus felt like He walked in darkness when He learned about the arrest & soon death of His cousin John the Baptist. Today's Gospel shares with us about Jesus' feelings over the loss of John & how He dealt with it. It says, "When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth & went down to live in Capernum by the sea, near the territory of Zebulun & Naphtali, to fulfill what had been said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali along the sea beyond the Jordan, heathen of Galilee: a people living in darkness has seen a great light. On those who inhabit a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen.'" So, Jesus apparently dealt with the loss of His cousin by withdrawing to the town where He has lived for thirty years & would recruit the disciples for His mission of being the light to a dark world. That is how He could find consolation from His personal loss & bring hope and new life to others.

I'm sure you might know other reasons for people to walk in darkness. However, I often wonder why those poor folks would not be able to get out of darkness & live a normal life. I think one of the factors to keep people in darkness is because they could not see & find their way out. They continue to get stuck in the world of darkness & have no hope for a better day. They seem to be imprisoned & enslaved by the power of darkness & have no reason to live. They also do not have enough strength to get themselves out of their sad & painful situations. So, it is their inability to see & lack of strength to break out of the prison of darkness that has kept them there. Then, who could bring them the light & show them the way out of the dungeon of darkness? Before I answer that question for us, let me share with you a short story. As you might know, the Eucharist is sacred & beneficial for us Catholics. That is why some of our parishioners have volunteered to bring it to nursing homes, hospitals, & houses for our homebound. Members of those places are lonely & confined there for various reasons. Thankfully our volunteers have been able to visit them & bring them the light of Jesus to cheer them up. I remember that, on one of my visits to the nursing home, a resident said: "You make my day. I have not had a visitor for a while." That day I realized that I have brought the light of Jesus & joy to that member who evidently was in darkness for a while. So, anyone of us could bring light to people in darkness & help them rejoice again.

My dear brothers & sisters, our world has a lot of people who are stuck in darkness for various reasons. They need to be set free & shown the way out of that prison. We can do that by giving them hope, showing them a reason to live, & bringing them something to cheer for. I hope we can be a great light of Jesus to our families, friends, & people around us in this New Year.