**3rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME [2014]**

READINGS: Isaiah 8:23-9:3 / Ps. 27 / 1 Cor. 1:10-13, 17 / Mt. 4:12-23

THEME: GREAT LIGHT FOR THOSE IN DARKNESS

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

Today’s theme is derived from a statement made by the prophet Isaiah and repeated in the gospel reading: ‘**The people who live in darkness have seen a GREAT LIGHT’** (Is. 9:1; Mt. 4:16). Often in Scriptures, darkness signifies evil, sin or wickedness, whereas light means godliness, righteousness or goodness.

The people of Zebulun and Naphtali knew that when God was delivering their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, He provided them with a ***protective light*** as they made their journey to the Promised Land. When for instance the Egyptian armies chased the Israelites close to the Red Sea, God made ‘the pillar of cloud … move from in front [of the Israelites] and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long’ (Ex 14:19-20). Also, the people of Zebulun and Naphtali knew that the ***light of God was not only protective but liberating as well***: ‘by day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night’ (Ex 13:21) to their land of freedom.

Unfortunately, through their sins or deeds of darkness, the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (including Zebulun and Naphtali) lost the ***protective light*** of God, and so they were conquered by the Assyrians. The message of the prophet Isaiah (in the first reading) was, therefore, to assure his people that they would experience or enjoy the ***liberating light*** of God provided they acknowledged their sins and repented.

Centuries later, Jesus Christ would appear as the ***Great Light*** to the people of Zebulun and Naphtali in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Mt. 4:16). As sin is the cause of the darkness in which the people found themselves, the very first word of Jesus’ message to them would be: ‘REPENT’. As at the Red Sea, on one side of the pillar of cloud the Israelites had light, but the Egyptians on the other side were in darkness, so in the time of Jesus, the people of Zebulun and Naphtali who repented experienced the Great Light (Jesus), but those who were un-repented remained in darkness. It is like people outdoors are experiencing the full effect of sunshine, whereas those in a ‘dark room’ (of film development) are not.

Jesus is not only the Great Light to the people of Zebulun and Naphtali; He is indeed the Great Light of the whole World (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Except for the 3-day eclipse of death which occurred long time ago at Calvary, the Great Light of Christ has been shining brightly for the past 2,000 years; and it will shine forever! However, many in the world are not experiencing the full effect of the great Sunshine of Christ, because they are in the ‘dark room’ of sin (while it is still broad day light). Beloved, let us heed the voice of Christ who says, ‘REPENT’! To repent is like walking out of the ‘dark room’ into the sunshine (outside).

The full statement of Jesus’ first preaching is: ‘REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NEAR’ (Mt. 4:17). This means that, when by repentance we walk into the broad day light of Christ, we can see clearly enough to catch a glimpse of the glory of heaven. Beloved, I prayed that as we walk out of the ‘dark room’ of ‘sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factionsand envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like’ (Gal 5:19-21), we will experience the sunshine of ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’ (Gal 5:22-23). And that as we continue to experience this sunshine, we will ultimately enjoy the ***heavenly*** love, joy and peace, which we now see from afar. Amen!