

3rd Sunday Ordinary Time
January 25-26, 2020

A light has arisen.

Readings: Isaiah 8:23-9:3; 1 Cor. 1:10-13,17; Matthew 4:12-17

The prophet Isaiah lived more than 700 years before Christ. This is so many years removed from our own experience that we have a very difficult time grasping what his daily life would have been like. Whether we are consumed with dodging the slush on all the side streets in Saint Paul or making our Super Bowl plans and predictions for next week, the people in the time of Isaiah had very different things on their minds.

Our Jewish ancestors, comprising just 2% of the population in pagan Galilee, were wondering how they would maintain the purity of their faith. Not surprisingly, many Jews had made alliances with the political powers of their day. The Jewish kings cozied up with pagan leaders who were much stronger than they, so that “big brother” would help them out.

The obvious problem with this was that they ended up paying dearly for such unholy alliances. The purity of their faith was being forgotten and shunned. Into this fray walks Isaiah, a prophet devoted entirely to the welfare of his people. He warns that alliances with mere mortals will take its toll in the end. At the same time, he looks ahead to brighter days. “On those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.”

Appreciating the anguish that he must have felt about such unholy alliances, I could not help but consider whether I too have capitulated in one respect or another to modern society. Have I been doing enough to help the poor, to stand up for life in the womb, to seek deeper holiness of life by means of the virtues? Have I become complacent, too comfortable with the status quo? Have I lost the zeal to effect positive change?

This past Tuesday evening, more than 250 young people gathered in the Cathedral for Mass, prior to leaving on six buses for Washington DC. Last year I accompanied the group. Then, on the following day I witnessed our Cathedral packed to overflowing for our annual Prayer Service for Life.

I wasn't expecting as many; but I asked myself why? Why should I have been surprised? Certainly, the media narrative ignores these voices, hardly covering the events or even underestimating the numbers. Then you contrast this with watching a time-lapse video condensed into one minute of all the people marching in Washington D.C. on Friday. It was amazing.

But I also questioned myself and my zeal. Why did I presume a smaller crowd? Our bishops have taught that protecting unborn life in the womb is a preeminent priority, and the Pope recently echoed this call. The new pro-life generation is on fire. People are not wearied- they are energized.

This isn't about raw politics, but rather about principles; it's about the truth of the human person at every stage. The need for mental health services is clearly growing; we see it here in the people who call or stop by. I try to help and yet know I could and should do more.

Our second reading rightly calls attention to the inherent problems with divisive attitudes resulting from alliances. "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Cephas." No, we all belong to Christ. We ought to be extremely cautious about making alliances with worldly powers because the only alliance that will ultimately bring about needed change, is an alliance with the Lord. He alone, by means of his grace, can and will change hearts.

Today is Word of God Sunday, a day dedicated to appreciating the depths of the treasures found in the Scriptures. Reading the Word of God helps to keep the flame of faith strong. It keeps us fresh and it greatly lessens the chance that we will grow lazy or lose the zeal we need to bring to light the truths of the faith in the public square.

For our part, we are called to be people of hope, even in the midst of tremendous challenge. Let us pray for the zeal of Isaiah, not trusting in political alliances, but trusting in the Lord. The Kingdom is at hand; it is in our midst and we are called to respond.