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Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - 22 January 2023

Gerard Moore

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22 January 2023

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

As the year starts to move us from relaxation and holidays to the familiar rhythm of work and school, our Gospel offers us an insight into the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He commences far from the centre of Law and religion, preaching, healing, reconciling and calling disciples in far removed Galilee. Though forced into an inauspicious place and with John under arrest, Jesus does not step back from his mission.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you. Lord have mercy.

You are our light and our salvation. Christ have mercy.

You came that all might be healed. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Almighty ever-living God,

direct our actions according to your good pleasure,

that in the name of your beloved Son

we may abound in good works.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

It is no accident that this oration is prayed in the first month of the year. Its seventh century origins lay in sets of Mass prayers for the days after Christmas, and especially those around the incoming of the new year. The Christmas context heightened the sense of God's 'good pleasure' in the incarnation as a central act in the mystery of the divine saving will. Further, the new year conjured up associations with the pagan god Janus and the influence of old divinities and spirits. It was these, in particular, that the collect unequivocally placed under the power of the 'name' of

the beloved Son. The petition that the faithful abound in good works was the church's response to the licentious cavorting that marked the Janus festivities.

Yet the prayer has another layer of meaning. The Latin text corresponds in structure, content and vocabulary to the Vulgate Latin translation of Ephesians 1:3-2:10. It speaks of the free and bounteous grace of God. It denotes the fullness of blessings that come in Christ, and the continuing power of Christ's name over every situation and evil. In this it calls the faithful to abound in good works, works which correspond to the blessings of God, are worthy of the name of the beloved Son, and so are pleasing to God. On reflection this prayer provides a good test of those easily forgotten new year resolutions!

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Isaiah 8:23—9:3

Our poem from the prophet Isaiah offers the hope of light in darkness and of the lifting of our burdens.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

Response: The Lord is my light and my salvation.

This psalm links strongly to Isaiah and to the gospel. Jesus is the Lord who brings light into the darkness.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Paul responds to the plea from Chloe's people and seeks unity amongst the community based in participation in the Cross of Christ.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

Jesus begins his ministry of teaching, reconciliation and healing in the remote districts of Galilee as John is arrested.

Reflection

Our first reading has been chosen ostensibly as a match to the geographic aspect of the Gospel narrative. And as usual there is a bit more at play. The prophet Isaiah is not so much interested in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali as their treatment by the Lord. Firstly, there is a double play. The lands are degraded by the Lord, and then glorified by God. The people are the people of Israel, but there is acknowledgement of gentiles as well. The theme of the Lord punishing and redeeming has a strong place across the Hebrew bible and is a particular literary tool in the hands of the prophets. It is applied here in the opening stanzas of our text.

Yet there is a second metaphor at work once the location is put aside. Admittedly it is closely related, but the sense is quite different. As the reading continues the prophet's contrasts provide something different. He has moved from the Lord punishing and redeeming to the people being under oppression and then freed. The sense is more existential. Where there was darkness and gloom now there shines a light. Where there was anguish and distress now there is joy and rejoicing. The people felt as though they walked in gloom, burdened by a yoke, under the oppressive forced march of a whip. Yet now something has changed. There is a new leader, a cause for hope, a journeying together that is not forced nor burdensome or oppressive.

There is something of a geographical divide at work in our reading from Corinthians. In Paul himself there is some possessive protection of the Christian communities he has founded, and some resistance to teachers who come in from 'outside'. But he also recognises the dangers of divisive behaviour and the need for a core centre of unity. It is hard not to think here of a parallel situation where 'new' people come into the community and the 'long term' members become a bit unsettled!

With Paul's situation there are some other dangers lurking. Firstly, he removes himself as best as he is able from the centre of the problem. There can be no sense that following Paul downgrades Christ. The opposite is true. It is Christ at the centre, and all others contribute to unity in Christ. With this comes the anxiety for Paul. The divisions in the community are based on personalities, and while diversity is accepted, division is not. The long standing tensions between Paul and Peter (Cephas) are brought to the surface. More interesting is the emergence of figures such as Apollos, where there is a hint that more than personality is involved. Paul will go on to take issue with those he calls 'super apostles', whose teaching may be suspect and who win over by personality. For our dogged apostle to the gentiles, they are too often deceivers seeking their own advantage.

There is also an acknowledgement of courage by Paul. He lets the community know that the group around Chloe has brought the divisiveness to his attention. They have the courage to name the issues and seek resolution. It is difficult to imagine that this strategy would make them welcome to other groups as peacemakers, but rather would identify them as 'dividers'. They show leadership and clearly have a sense that there is danger lurking in the community at large; Paul is wise enough and concerned enough to respond.

Paul calls the members of the fledgling community to focus on the person that unites them, on Christ, and on his genuine teachings. It is Christ in Paul, in Peter and in Apollos that enables them to be teachers and apostles and guides. Furthermore, the Christ recognised in them is the Christ crucified. Paul and Peter certainly meet this mark, though we know little of Apollos. The baptised should not look for personalities but for witnesses to the Cross.

The recent Plenary Council and the ongoing Church-wide discussions around synodality, make this reading pertinent to us today. Synodality has an openness and respect for difference and diversity of gifts and approaches, but only if centred in the reality of the Cross and the core teachings of Jesus. There are Church factions, some deliberately created. Often our Church belonging has more 'personalised' feel, where leaders attract adherents. In fact, it is this dynamic that Pope Francis is trying to disable. Rather, he seeks a Church built on baptism and faith. He would be one with Paul asking what is distracting us from a holding Christ at the centre and engaging with the community and creation as missionary disciples of Christ rather than disciples of one leader or another.

Our gospel shows Jesus acutely aware of his environment and of his mission. It also opens up an interesting dynamic of the Gospel writer. Let's start with a feature of Matthew's style. The evangelist heads this passage with a reference to the prophet Isaiah. Close examination shows that he has not captured the original text accurately. Matthew's reference is inspired by Isaiah, does cover the geographical areas, but is not the exact text and more importantly cuts out the dynamic of God punishing and freeing! Here we have an ancient writer at work, allowing a revered text to inform his new writing. Matthew's point in using Isaiah is not to be literal about the poet, but rather to show Jesus as within the mould of a prophet by locating him in the same regions that Isaiah wrote about. What follows is how Jesus, the new and complete prophet, acts in ways that surpass the prophecy itself. He will be the one who releases the people from their yoke, who brings light to darkness.

Matthew gives us an announcement of the 'way' of Jesus the prophet, whose message is of repentance and the incoming of the reign of God. It is immediately effective. He gathers disciples who willingly leave all and follow him. They are not from the priestly or scribal classes, they are not learned in the law or the temple. They do respond to his preaching and see in it the reign of God, giving up much to follow him. Despite all this they remain loyal and close to Jesus. Unlikely as they seem, they are a good first set of team members! Jesus preaches, invites into the reign of God, cures disease and illness. He is welcomed in synagogues as one who can open up the word of God. Jesus is also aware of the danger of his mission. With the arrest of John, the Master shares his particular mission and love with the people of the far reaches of Palestine. Jesus' initial focus is the coastal shores of Galilee: the word of God is for everyone, particularly the lowly, the ill, the possessed, those without hope.

We can see in this mission a metaphorical link to Paul's dynamic with the Corinthians. Jesus is amongst those who bear the burden, the 'cross' if you like, of illness, non-acceptance, expulsion, possession, poverty. He enlivens their hearts with his preaching and enables their lives with his healing and communal reconciliation. As presaged in the arrest of John, the mission of Jesus to help those burdened with their imposed 'cross' leads to his assumption of the Cross. There is an invitation to us, here at the beginning of the year, to consciously embrace the Cross that seeks to heal and include. It is a call to missionary discipleship and synodal responsibility.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Just as Peter and Andrew 'left their nets' to follow Christ, we gather together to pray for the needs of our Church, for those who are lost, as well as our own community.

Petitions

We pray for the continual protection of our Church leaders, especially Pope Francis, as they follow the call of God in their lives and lead us towards the Synod of 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for world leaders in this time of war and economic difficulty. May they hold true to values that support the care of the poor and those displaced by war, natural disasters and climate change.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the police force and those who work in the emergency services, that they will be granted the strength and courage to care for those who have suffered injury through floods, fire or road trauma.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who do not know Christ. May they come to know the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through the efforts of those who have been baptised in faith.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the victims and survivors of persecution, including our nation's asylum seekers and refugees, that they be comforted in their time of need by those who live their lives in a Christ-centred and missionary way.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who suffer grief and struggle with the needed changes. May the love of those around them bring them the light of Christ in their place of darkness.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Gracious God, we ask that you hear our prayers and grant our petitions, as we continue to humbly seek your face in the poor. We make this prayer through the power of the Spirit, and the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVNG	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1
All that is hidden	127						
Be thou my vision	9				733	455	
Christ, be our light		3		404		540	105
Christ is made the sure foundation				482	640		
Christ is the world's light					643	467	
Christ light, shining in the darkness						468	
City of God				498		453	
God of day and God of darkness						498	
God, your glory we have seen in your Son					695		
How can I keep from singing?				454			
I am sure I shall see			70				
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54			468		512	
Lord, whose love in humble service					741	551	
Love divine, all loves excelling				463	740	552	
Out of darkness	134			504			
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty		132			792	586	
Sing a new song unto the Lord	80			414		598	
The Church's one foundation				484	819	614	
The Lord is my light (Mahler)			126				
The Lord is my light (McDonell)							(S&S2)252
The Lord is my light (Walker)							61
The Lord is my light and my salvation							(S&S2)253
The people who in darkness walked						272	
The summons			149	502		645	137
The voice of God				476	835	621	
We are children of the living God			AOV4K 15				

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 26: *The Lord is my light and my salvation.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 26	63, 330, 469	27, 28	pg. 57	pg. 83	pg. 25

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Sing new songs of joy (FWS/CWBII) *based on Ps 97 (98)* [Gathering, Recessional]

You are the light (FWS) *based on Ps 26 (27)* [Gathering]

The Lord is my light (LCC) *Ps 26/27 (Chn's Lectionary)*