

A Land Overshadowed by Death
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Is 8:23-9:3; Mt 4:12-17)

When Jesus the Messiah began his public ministry, he did something unexpected. Instead of centering his ministry in Jerusalem and Judea to the south, he established his headquarters in the small town of Capernaum in the region of Galilee, far to the north. This area was part of the old northern kingdom where the ten “lost tribes” of tribes of Israel once dwelt, long since scattered by the Assyrians during their conquest in 722 BC. Specifically, Jesus ministered in the ancient tribal regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.

At the time Jesus came to this area it was a mix of pagan Gentile peoples, with small colonies of Jewish settlements. Jesus began his ministry there, in fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah (Is 9:1-2): *“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.”*

This Gospel reading is very apropos today. As in the time of Jesus, we live in small parish colonies in the midst of a gentile society given over to pagan ways. At one time our land was more Christian in its values and laws, but that ancient Christian heritage has been banished and exiled. Now our land too has fallen into darkness and become overshadowed by death.

Today we remember a black day in our nation’s history: January 22nd, the day on which the crime of abortion was “legalized” in 1973 by the United States Supreme Court, in the decision “Roe vs. Wade.” On this day it became legal to put away innocent people in our society, for the sake of convenience and personal autonomy. Very simply, the legalization of abortion is the legalization of murder, homicide.

On this day we put blinders over our eyes, and deliberately chose to live in darkness instead of the light of Truth. Evil can only thrive when there is darkness. We do all sorts of mental gymnastics to try justify abortion: illogical arguments, outright lies, denials, and twisting of language. We focus on difficult, extreme, and exceptional medical situations, as if that has anything to do with what was actually legalized in 1973. We speak about freedom of “choice,” ignoring the fact that the choice involved is actually a “child,” another person. People talk about “reproductive freedom,” and “women’s health,” when in fact freedom is destroyed, health compromised, and motherhood injured. People refer to “clinics,” when in fact they are death camps, factories of human destruction surrounded by high walls and barbed wire, where “patients” enter by hiding under umbrellas.

In justifying this terrible decision, the supreme court had to invent a non-constitutional right to “privacy,” ignoring the fundamental right to “life,” enshrined and proclaimed as “inalienable” in the foundational documents of our nation:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Decl. of Independence).

The U.S. Declaration of Independence declares that we as a nation exist under God’s laws, built upon the fundamental rights and dignities which our Creator establishes in our human existence, and it is our duty as a nation to respect and abide by those laws of God. In 1973 we rejected that, and became like the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, falling into darkness and the shadow of death.

This practice represents a denial of God, who is the Creator and author of life. It is the failure to respect the mystery of human life, which is an individual miracle of God each time it happens. It is also a failure to respect the responsibility of marriage and sexuality, and if we are honest we have to admit that the real reason we keep abortion legal in our nation is because we wish to indulge in fornication and not have to worry about the consequences, which is a child. Abortion is closely connected to, and flows from, the “contraceptive mentality.”

In his 1995 encyclical entitled *Evangelium Vitae*, the “Gospel of Life,” pope John Paul II clarified how respect for the sanctity of human life, from the moment of conception to natural death, belongs to the domain of God alone; not to man, not to society, not to legislators or supreme court judges, presidents, or politicians. Abortion is therefore not a political issue, it is of the essence of the faith. Invoking his infallible teaching authority, the pope solemnly proclaimed that the life of the unborn, from the moment of conception, is as sacred as any other time of the human life span, and is to be treated as such. In other words, being “pro-abortion” (i.e. “pro-choice”) is not only immoral, it is *heretical*. A Catholic cannot be pro-abortion without denying the Gospel of Christ. This is a doctrinal issue.

The Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is a Gospel of the dignity of life. Today the Church must continue the work of the Jesus, which is to bring light in the darkness. The Church must do what Jesus did.

When Jesus came into that region “*overshadowed by death*,” where “*the people sit in darkness*,” he began to preach saying, “*Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*.”

The Church must therefore *Preach* the truth and issue the call to repentance. We do this by proclaiming the truth regarding human life, exposing the lies propagated in the media, educational, and political establishments, and

confronting/rejecting pro-abortion political candidates. The unborn child is another person, fully human, entitled to the same legal protections as any man.

Within the Christian community, the Church attaches the penalty of excommunication to any Catholic who would procure an abortion, or assist with its procurement. Abortion is not just a mortal sin, it is the crime of murder. It destroys the family and society, and gravely injures all persons who cooperate in the crime. Excommunication is a solemn way to proclaim the holiness of God's Commandments, and the Church's obligation to call to repentance.

When Jesus went about the villages of Galilee, he thus exposed evil and sin by his teaching, banishing the demonic spirits who were the source of the darkness. This work continues in the Church, which possesses the authority of Christ. Pray for bishops and priests, that they might expose this evil, and confront the spiritual and human powers who would justify this crime through lies and distortions.

In addition to the task of preaching with authority, Jesus brought *Healing* to people who had suffered under the lies and tyranny of the demons. The Church does the same today. The Church is not "against women" or insensitive to the difficulties and pressures faced by individuals who commit these and other sins. Instead, it is in the Church and her sacraments, her retreat programs and outreach ministries, and especially through the men and women of her pro-life movement, that people injured by the culture of death have been able to find healing and hope, and above all reconciliation.

The sacrament of Penance, available only through the ministry of the Church, is a healing sacrament, restoring peace to relationships: with God, with the unborn soul, within the self. Only Christ provides a path of redemption out of guilt into new life. Only Christ offers this mercy greater than all sin.

The mystery of life in the womb is a particular object of the devil's ire. He attacks the woman about to give birth, seeking to devour her unborn child (Rv 12:4). Mary is the woman who proclaims fully the Gospel of life, since God became true man in her womb at the moment of the Annunciation, nine months before the Nativity. And it is through her that her offspring will crush the serpent (Gn 3:15).

Let us invoke our Blessed Mother as we seek to fulfill the mission Christ gives us today: to bring light to those who dwell in darkness, to bring healing to those in a land overshadowed by the culture of death.