



## January 23, 2011

### The Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

*He left Nazareth and went down to live in Capernaum by the sea near the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet Isaiah:...a people living in darkness have seen a great light...—  
Matthew 4:13-16*

Dear Friends;

For whom did Jesus come? Did he come for the righteous, a faithful remnant or those who maintain religious purity? Or did he come for everyone?

Today's Gospel passage from Matthew has Jesus moving out from Nazareth to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, near the regions of Zebulon and Naphtali. Matthew mentions this geography because these were the places first lost by Israel through the aggression of Assyrian Empire. We know also that during Jesus' time there was a mix of Jews and Gentiles in this region. The Jewish population was on the western side of the Sea of Galilee and Gentiles on the eastern shore. Not far from Nazareth was also a large Gentile city. Galilee was a diverse multicultural and religious mix.

For those who thought the purity of Judaism needs to be preserved, Jerusalem was the place to be. The Pharisees and other "true believers" looked with suspicion on the Jews of Galilee. The Galilean Jews lived in too close contact with the non-Jewish world.

Jesus' choice indicates that he has come first to gather together the "lost sheep of the House of Israel" but also will initiate a ministry to the Gentiles. Isaiah said that Israel would be restored and become a "light to the nations." So in effect Jesus comes for everyone.

*Lumen Gentium—the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, from the Second Vatican Council (1961-65), says that "Christ is the light for all the nations...and desires to bring all humanity the light of Christ." It goes on to say that the Church is a sacrament and sign of the unity to which God calls the entire human race.

Next year we will be implementing a new translation of the Roman Missal. It is a mixed bag, some improvements but also a lot of awkwardness due to a literal approach to translating. One of the most important changes is the words of Jesus over the cup. "This is the chalice (i.e. cup) of my blood... shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." Presently, "many" reads "for all."

In short it is translated this way because *pro multis* is literally rendered *for many*. However since Latin has no articles one could add "the", "for the many," the Latin can suggest the multitude. However it muddies our understanding for who Jesus is offering his life-blood.

"For many" is literally correct but needs explanation. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that Jesus came to "'give his life for the many'; this last term is not restrictive but contrasts the whole of humanity with the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over for us. The Church, following the teaching of the apostles, teaches that Jesus died for all men without exception."

Jesus (as far as we know) did not speak Latin. He would have used the Aramaic form of "for the many" because it would have connected him to the figure of the suffering servant in Isaiah. And as the Vatican's biblical scholar, Max Zerwick SJ, at the time of our first translation, said "The Semitic mind of the bible could see the universality connoted in the phrase 'for many.'...Yet, however eloquent it was for ancient peoples, today that illusion to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah is clear only to experts." This is why it is currently translated "for all."

So why are we changing it? Dominican Fr Paul Philbert suspects that it reflects the agenda of the "restorationists." (America, January 2011) He says that "for many" needs always to be explained. Otherwise it becomes too narrow. The ambiguity of "for many" mirrors the growing tendency of these restorationists "to reinvent the church as a faithful remnant of those untouched by secularization and cultural change—those, in other words, who are perfectly comfortable in a pre-Vatican II world, preoccupied with its own sanctity and well-being." This of course runs contrary to Scripture and the teachings of Vatican II.

We need to follow Jesus' example and be willing to move into new territory in order to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus calls us to gather people in, not to become an exclusive society. "There is not, never will be a single person for whom Christ did not suffer." (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Peace,

*Fr Ron*