

# THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = i-ZAY-uh

Zebulun = ZEB-yoo-luhn

The tone of this reading is triumphant and uplifting.

NAF-tuh-li

Gentiles = JEN-tīls

Emphasis on "no gloom."

"Abundant joy" and "great rejoicing" describe the message of this reading.

Emphasis on "yoke," "pole," and "rod."

Midian = MID-ee-uhn

## LECTIONARY #67

READING I Isaiah 8:23—9:3

### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

**First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles.**

**Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress.**

**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.**

**You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.**

**For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.**

### READING I

On this Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, the theme of today's readings is the same as last Sunday: the commissioning of God's servants to reveal God's salvation to the world.

Our first reading is from the Book of Isaiah. When reading the prophets, it is important to know as much as we can about the historical context, because, regardless of the meanings we attach to their oracles today, the prophets were addressing real-life situations in their own time. We cannot be confident of the integrity of our contemporary interpretations of

prophetic discourse unless we can connect the circumstances of the past with the present.

Isaiah served as God's prophet for approximately forty years, during which time he witnessed the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel, also known as Ephraim, beginning in 733 bc and Syria in 732 bc. When the oracle that comprises our first reading was delivered, Ahaz was king of Judah. He was facing considerable pressure from Syria and Israel to join a coalition against Assyria. When he refused, Syria and Israel invaded Judah with the

intent of unseating Ahaz—an event known as the Syro-Ephraimite War. Eventually, the entire northern kingdom was decimated by the Assyrians and its people deported in 721 bc, while the southern kingdom of Judah became a vassal of Assyria.

This truly was a dark time in Judah's history. Isaiah attributes the destruction of Israel to God, according to the pattern of Deuteronomistic history: Israel sins; God punishes; Israel repents; God forgives. How does God show forgiveness? The Assyrian provinces of Dor, Gilead, and Megiddo, which were fashioned from land that once

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 27:1, 4, 13–14 (1a)

**R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;  
of whom should I be afraid?

One thing I ask of the LORD;  
this I seek:

to dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
that I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD  
and contemplate his temple.

I believe that I shall see the bounty  
of the LORD  
in the land of the living.  
Wait for the LORD with courage;  
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

READING II 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17

**A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians**

**I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our**

**Lord Jesus Christ,**

**that all of you agree in what you say,  
and that there be no divisions among you,  
but that you be united in the same mind  
and in the same purpose.**

For it has been reported to **me about you,**

**my brothers and sisters,**

**by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you.**

I mean that **each of you is saying,**

**"I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos,"  
or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."**

**Is Christ divided?**

**Was Paul crucified for you?**

**Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

**For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,  
and not with the wisdom of human eloquence,  
so that the cross of Christ might not be  
emptied of its meaning.**

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhn-z

The tone of this reading is one of urgency and intensity.

Slight pause between "divisions" and "among."

Chloe = KLOH-ee

Apollos = uh-POL-uhs

Note the shifts in energy from the pronoun "I" to the proper nouns, "Paul," "Apollos," "Cephas," and "Christ."

Cephas = SEE-fuhs

These two questions shape Paul's argument to the Corinthians. Slight pause between "Paul" and "crucified."

belonged to Israel, are allowed to prosper. Thus, as the prophet says, the gloom and darkness will be lifted, and light will shine on the land. The pronoun "you" in this passage refers to God; Isaiah is the speaker. Biblical scholars have described this part of today's reading as a hymn to accompany accession to the throne or a thanksgiving hymn directed to God. The "yoke," "pole," and "rod" are symbols of Assyrian oppression that will one day be thrown off in holy war, as in the day of Midian and as when God destroyed the Israelites' oppressors by the hand of Gideon, one of several judges

whose stories are told in the book of Judges (see Judges 6–8).

The remainder of this oracle, which is not part of today's first reading, is presumed to be about the son that would be born to Ahaz, whose name was Hezekiah and who would inherit Judah's throne after Ahaz. The Second Book of Kings and the Second Book of Chronicles portray him as a good and righteous king, in contrast to his father. However, the list of attributes of a good king, the verses that follow today's reading that describe the child to be born, might be intended to describe some future

and long-awaited king. Early Christians attributed this description to Jesus, the bringer of peace and the one who will usher in the fulness of God's kingdom.

**READING II**

Today's second reading is the beginning of the body of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Immediately following the thanksgiving (1 Corinthians 1:4–9), Paul exhorts the Corinthian community to unity, after hearing a report about divisions that have surfaced among them. The report came from "Chloe's people," who we can assume are

The tenuousness and excitement of Christ beginning his ministry pervade this reading. For the longer form of the reading, use the word "withdrew" to focus your proclamation.

Capernaum = kuh-PER-nee-\*m or kuh-PER-nay-\*m or kuh-PER-n\*m

Zebulun = ZEB-yoo-luhn

Naphtali = NAF-tuh-li

Slight pause between "death" and "light."

Use "fishers of men" to focus your proclamation for the second half of this reading.

Zebedee = ZEB-uh-dee

employees or slaves of this otherwise unknown businesswoman. We can further assume that Chloe and her servants are followers of Jesus. The servants probably visited the community while on a business trip in or through Corinth and then reported to Paul what they had seen and heard.

Paul is understandably concerned about the divisions in the community, because of his understanding of church as *koinonia*, meaning "fellowship or partnership." This is why he urges them to "be united in the same mind and in the same purpose." Apparently, their divisions stem

## GOSPEL Matthew 4:12–23

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he **withdrew** to Galilee.

He left **Nazareth** and went to live in **Capernaum** by the sea, in the **region** of **Zebulun** and **Naphtali**, that what had been **said** through **Isaiah** the **prophet** might be fulfilled:

*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.**

From **that time on**, Jesus began to **preach** and say, "**Repent**, for the **kingdom** of **heaven** is at **hand**."

As he was **walking** by the Sea of **Galilee**, he saw two **brothers**, **Simon** who is called **Peter**, and his brother **Andrew**, casting a net into the **sea**; they were **fishermen**.

He **said** to them,

"**Come** after **me**, and I will make you **fishers** of **men**."

At **once** they left their **nets** and **followed** him.

He walked **along** from **there** and saw two **other** **brothers**, **James**, the son of **Zebedee**, and his brother **John**.

They were in a **boat**, with their father **Zebedee**, mending their **nets**.

from allegiances that they formed around the person they claim as their spiritual leader. Apollos, who is mentioned here and elsewhere in this letter, is described in Acts of the Apostles as a Jewish rhetorician and scripture scholar from Alexandria in Egypt, who later became a Christian preacher (Acts 18:24–28). Most likely, the person whom Paul names as Cephas is Peter. Paul uses this same name in his Letter to the Galatians.

In context, the meaning of "I belong to Christ" is not clear, but Paul's response to the community was to fire off a set of

rhetorical questions, in which the speaker is not looking for a response because the intended answer is imbedded in the question. This is much easier done in Greek than in English, but the three questions would read something like this: Then you are saying that Christ is divided, aren't you? And you are not saying that Paul was crucified for you, are you? And you cannot be saying that you were baptized in Paul's name, can you?

Paul's argument reaches its climax when he declares the primary purpose of his ministry: to preach the good news of

He **called** them, and immediately they left their **boat**  
 and their **father**  
 and **followed** him.  
 He went around **all** of **Galilee**,  
**teaching** in their **synagogues**, proclaiming the **gospel**  
 of the **kingdom**,  
 and curing **every disease** and **illness among the people**.

[Shorter: Matthew 4:12–17 (see brackets)]

Jesus Christ, even if imperfectly, so that the power of Jesus' crucifixion can be made manifest in their hearts and minds.

#### GOSPEL

Perhaps you know that the lectionary is organized so that the themes of the first reading and the Gospel cohere in some way. Today's first reading and Gospel reading are a perfect example. Notice how the author of Matthew's Gospel situates Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee and cites an abbreviated version of the prophecy we hear from Isaiah in the first reading. One might

deduce from the way that the writer incorporated this quotation that he intends to suggest that Jesus is the light to the nations and the one who will initiate God's coming kingdom.

As an indication of the Gospel writer's Jewish background, he describes Jesus as calling for repentance and saying, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" not "kingdom of God," as we see in the other Gospels. Out of respect for the name of God, our Jewish brothers and sisters do not speak the name aloud. Regardless of whether we use the phrase "kingdom of

God" or "kingdom of heaven," it is important to recognize that Jesus is not talking about a place. Instead, we should think about the kingdom as the reign of God, when God's power is fully manifest for all to see and when there is no more hunger or violence, sickness or death in all the world. Such is the good news of Jesus Christ! C.C.