

### **3rd Sun of Ord & Respect Life Sun & Word of God Sun (Mt 4:12-17)**

**21 Jan 23**

This weekend we celebrate the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time. Of course, no Sunday is actually ordinary. With increasing regularity, we're seeing these not so ordinary Sundays being used to draw attention to a certain set of scriptures and/or a particular topical or theological concept. This weekend we have all three. We are called to celebrate Respect Life Sunday and are asked to pray in a special way for an end to abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia as well as pray for the respect of all human life. Additionally, in 2019, Pope Francis declared that the third Sunday in Ordinary Time be known as Word of God Sunday. A Sunday to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the Word of God. A day devoted to the Bible and personal commitment to growth in our knowledge and love of the Sacred Scriptures. And of course, as is the case every week, we are called to contemplate the Sunday readings. Don't worry, I won't be giving three homilies. I just wanted to share this information so that no one would feel left in the dark.

Afterall, studies have shown that many of us are afraid of the dark (nyctophobia). I know what you're thinking, fear of the dark is kids stuff. As adults, we're more afraid of the electric bill than we are of the dark. But, the truth is, very few of us are actually comfortable in dark spaces. Remember too, that darkness can be more than simply an absence of light. As we heard in our first reading and again in our gospel, it was not uncommon for the people of Galilee, and by extension all of us, to find ourselves blanketed in the darkness of sin and despair or confronted by the gloom and dark clouds of depression and death.

I believe that our fear and discomfort when confronting darkness may ultimately rest in our inability to trust our eyes. In the darkness or lurking in the shadows, we see things; we see ill-defined shapes and sudden movement. We see

people we can't quite identify and we frequently anticipate negative outcomes. Sometimes our creative imaginations even see things that aren't actually present at all. The darkness distorts our vision and often creates feelings of angst, isolation, hopelessness and fear. Left unchecked, the darkness can blind our ability to see or find light. Especially the new dawn of light that is Jesus. Matthew's gospel describes Jesus' ministry in Galilee with the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The people in darkness have seen a great light." In John Gospel (8:12), Jesus assures us that: "HE IS the light of the world and that whoever follows him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." When we allow ourselves to be guided by the light that is Jesus, our faith grows and our vision is restored.

The light of Christ allows us to see the prisoner not as a murderer but as a human being. Christ's light enables us to see the soul-filled growth in a woman's womb not as a fetus or zygote but as a child. It is the beacon of Christ's light that allows us to see the poor and the vulnerable as people of dignity and worthy of justice. The light of Christ becomes the reading lamp by which we comprehend the lessons of Sacred Scripture so that we might learn what it means to be followers of Jesus. The light of Christ enables us to see the Eucharist as the body and blood of our Savior, and enables us to see the love offered by his death on the cross. And only Christ's light enables us to see the possibility of eternal happiness in the place that we call heaven. Without the light of Christ, the promise of our God who loves us, we run the risk of being forever trapped in darkness.

Each and every one of us is threatened by the darkness of the world in which we live. In order to avoid that darkness we must choose to have faith in the light of Christ. The same light of our baptism by which we were set free from the darkness of sin and commissioned to keep the light of Christ burning brightly. If we do our part, living lives illuminated by Christ, then we become light for others and no one need fear the evil of darkness, or the electric bill.

