

Homily for the III Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A
Is 8:23 – 9:3; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4:12-23

Those of you who saw the remarkable film *Amazing Grace* remember the story of William Wilberforce, a British politician who, after his conversion to Christianity, became England's greatest anti-slavery advocate. One of the most powerful moments in the film *Amazing Grace* is when William Wilberforce realises that his conversion to Christ did not mean escaping the world but engaging it differently. After becoming a Christian, Wilberforce wanted to leave politics and enter the ministry. Unsure how faith could survive in public life, he turned to John Newton – the former slave trader turned priest who wrote *Amazing Grace*. Newton gave him a wake-up call: *God did not save you to remove you from the world, but to change it from within*. Wilberforce stayed in politics, and through him God brought freedom to countless lives.

That same kind of wake-up call happens in today's Gospel.

Matthew tells us that Jesus begins his public ministry not in Jerusalem, but in Galilee – specifically in the territory of **Zebulun and Naphtali**, lands Isaiah had described centuries earlier as a place of darkness. Historically, this region had suffered first and most from invasion. Assyrians, Babylonians, and later Romans all came “from the north,” and Galilee bore the brunt. Its people experienced conquest, forced cultural mixing, religious compromise, and deep humiliation. By Jesus' time it was known as “*Galilee of the Gentiles*” – religiously suspect, socially marginal, spiritually wounded.

And yet Isaiah proclaims hope: “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*” Isaiah speaks in the past tense – as if it has already happened – because when God promises salvation, it is as good as done.

Matthew wants us to see that **Jesus himself is that Light**. When Jesus settles in Capernaum and begins to preach, Isaiah's prophecy comes alive. God does not shine his light first in the powerful or the pure, but among the overlooked and the broken. Jesus deliberately places himself among the poor, the working people, the ruled rather than the rulers. From the very beginning, the Kingdom of Heaven breaks into the world from the margins.

And what is Jesus' first message? “*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*”

Repentance here means far more than feeling sorry. The Greek word *metanoia* means a **change of mind, a change of direction**, a turning of the whole self toward God. Jesus is not merely asking people to clean up their past, but to entrust their future to him. Repentance is ongoing – it is a way of life. To live in God's Kingdom means letting God reign over our decisions, priorities, relationships, and hopes. The Kingdom is not a place we go someday; it is a reality we enter whenever God's will begins to shape our lives.

Immediately after preaching repentance, Jesus calls disciples. He does not recruit scholars or religious elites. He calls fishermen – ordinary men doing ordinary work. “Come after me,” he says, “and I will make you fishers of men.” They are given no

job description, no roadmap, no guarantees. Matthew simply says, *“At once they left their nets and followed him.”*

That detail matters. Nets represent security, control, and familiarity. To follow Jesus means letting go of what we cling to so tightly – our certainties, our comforts, our illusions of control. The disciples were not chosen because of their ability, but because of their availability. And the same is true today. Christ does not ask us to be extraordinary – only willing.

Fishing, in the biblical world, meant drawing people from one way of life into another. Jesus pulls us out of the waters where we think we are in control, so that God can give us a new life. Later Jesus will say to his followers, *“You are the light of the world.”* First, he shines the light; then he entrusts it to us.

This is where today’s Gospel becomes personal. Each of us has heard Christ’s call – in Baptism, in Eucharist, repeatedly in moments of grace. We are called not away from the world, but into it, as bearers of Christ’s light. In a world darkened by division, injustice, fear, and indifference, we are sent to live differently: repentant hearts, surrendered lives, and courageous faith.

Like Wilberforce, like the fishermen of Galilee, we are called exactly where we are. And when we follow, even imperfectly, the light spreads. Darkness never has the last word. Christ does.