

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A)
1-25-2026 Homily.

I. Introduction

Some tourists were visiting the famous Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, including a family with an eight-year-old boy and a five-year-old girl. When they were all in a cave many feet below ground, the tour guide turned out the lights as a way of showing how dark the cave actually was, and as everyone was plunged into total darkness, the girl began crying. However, her brother said, “Don’t worry, Amy—there’s a man with us who knows how to turn the lights on again” (Mark Link, S.J., *Illustrated Sunday Homilies*, Year A, p. 51). This reassuring message also applies to all who place their trust in Jesus; He is Someone “with us” Who knows how to turn on the lights again when we can’t see the way. God sent His Son for our salvation, so that we might be saved from sin and worry and fear—and in this way, the light of Jesus overcomes our darkness.

II. Development

The readings we’ve heard today tell us not only that God provides the light of His grace, but also that we have the responsibility of accepting it and using it properly. The 1st Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah refers to the invasion of Israel by the powerful Assyrian empire some 700 years before Christ—a time of great suffering and distress for God’s people. The Lord didn’t abandon them, however; rather, He protected and restored them. Thus, the reading says “Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone; You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing.”

This Old Testament passage foreshadows or introduces today’s Gospel. When Jesus heard that His cousin John the Baptist had been arrested, He went to Galilee—not to withdraw, but to take up the challenge of preaching the Good News. In this He fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy: “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.” Zebulun and Naphtali refer to regions in Galilee which were inhabited by Gentiles as well as by Jews. Our Lord chose to begin His mission there because He came to save all people, Jews and non-Jews alike. His message was: “Reform your lives! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,” and we see that He here chose four of His disciples to help Him spread the Good News: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John.

We know that the Church was established by Christ and that many people received the light of faith—but today’s 2nd Reading is a warning not to let this light be snuffed out through enmity and divisions. St. Paul had established a Christian community in the Greek city of Corinth—but it was soon troubled by factions and differences of opinion. Paul writes here to urge unity in Christ—for when we see things only through our own preferences and desires, we’re blinded to the light of faith.

III. Conclusion

Many of us experience times of darkness in our lives, but the Lord can provide us with the light we need—and sometimes we see or hear of inspiring examples illustrating this truth. One of them involves a former professional football player who died in 2007. Darryl Stingley was a highly talented wide receiver for the New England Patriots, but in a preseason game in the late 1970s he was tackled so severely that he suffered permanent paralysis from the chest down; from then on he had the use of only one of his hands, and had to rely on an electric wheelchair to get around. He had been one of the top players in the National Football League—but then, through his accident, it was as if the light suddenly went out in his life. However, Stingley was a Christian who believed God could provide light and meaning to his life after his injury. In fact, in an interview with a national magazine, he insisted his life was in some ways better than it was before; he said, “I had tunnel vision. All I wanted was to be the best athlete I could, and a lot of things were overlooked. Now I’ve come back to them. . . This is a rebirth for me. Not only physically but spiritually. . . I really have a lot more meaning and purpose to live for now than ever before” (Link, op. cit.).

This was an incredible testimony from someone who suffered terrible misfortune—but God’s light always has the power to shine in our darkness. Perhaps we’ve had to bear the death of a spouse or family member, the break-up of a long friendship, the loss of good health, the sudden impossibility of a long-cherished dream, a serious and unexpected financial setback, or various other tragedies, burdens, or disappointments. These can plunge our lives into darkness—but God is able to provide the light and strength we need. All we must do is turn to Him in a spirit of humble trust.

One who understood this well was St. John Newman, a great 19th century Anglican church leader who converted to Catholicism and eventually became a cardinal in the Church. As a young man he was visiting Sicily when he became seriously ill and nearly died. I’ll conclude with a famous short poem he wrote after his recovery:

Lead, kindly Light,
amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,
and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou my feet;
I do not ask to see
the distant scene—
one step [is] enough for me.