

Theme: BE A LIGHT TO OTHERS!

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

25 January 2026

There was a story about a man, Eli, who lived in a small village by the lake who spent his days repairing nets and watching boats come and go. He dreamed of something more, but he did not know what it was. Life felt safe, yet empty, like casting a net into shallow water.

One afternoon, a traveler passed through the village. He did not wear fine clothes or speak loudly, but his eyes were full of peace. He stopped near the shore and spoke to the people about God's love, about turning away from darkness, and about a new beginning. Eli felt as if those words were meant especially for him.

As the traveler walked along the water, he called out, "Come, follow me." Eli hesitated. His nets were unfinished. His routine was familiar. But his heart was burning. He left the nets where they were and followed.

Soon, Eli found himself walking with others who had also left their old lives behind. Together they visited villages, bringing hope to the sick, comforting the broken, and light to those who felt lost. Eli realized that his true calling was not just to catch fish, but to help people discover God's mercy.

And so, like the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew 4:12-23, Eli learned that when Jesus calls, He invites us out of ordinary life into a mission that fills our hearts and changes the world. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, looking back to the beautiful story of the Gospel, after successfully overcoming Satan's three-fold temptation, Jesus began his public ministry (Mt 4:12-23). John the Baptist was then in prison and with his voice silenced, his ministry came to an end. Because of this, John's disciples and Jesus encountered a crisis at that time, but Jesus looks at it as a heavenly sign and opportune time to fill the void. So, he left Nazareth for the Galilean town of Capernaum in order to begin HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY.

To show the significance of this major "career" shift of Jesus - from carpenter to itinerant preacher - Matthew presented it as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen the great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen." Though Matthew took liberties in changing Isaiah's "district of the Gentiles" to "Galilee of the Gentiles" including all people, through this quotation, he wanted to present Jesus as "the great light" who would disperse the shadow of death, of sin, that had enveloped the world.

Thus, Capernaum was an unlikely place for Jesus to begin his ministry. It was a bustling business center. Traders from other nations converged there. Being exposed to all kinds of cultures, the Jews there were weak in Jewish orthodoxy. But instead of considering this as a negative factor, Jesus looked at it positively: their exposure to different cultures had made them open minded. Thus, they might just be the kind of people who would listen to his message. Like John, Jesus used repentance in his initial utterances. There was thus continuity in their ministries. But while John asked the people to repent to prepare for the coming of the Promised One, Jesus told the people to repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, that is, the Bearer of the Kingdom was already in their midst.

While the evangelists Luke and John allowed time for the disciples to find out more about Jesus before they were called, Matthew did no such thing. He immediately showed Jesus calling two sets of fishermen brothers - Simon (later named Peter) and Andrew and John and James. And except for telling them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men, He gave no indication about what following him (discipleship) entailed - where they were going and what they would do. Matthew was not concerned with those details. His concern was that Jesus was about to begin his public ministry and he needed help so that he could make himself, the "great light" shine on people.

How did the first four disciples respond to Jesus' call? In Matthew's words, "at once they left their nets and followed him."

By our baptism, we have received the light of Jesus and have thus been called to discipleship. In this regard, we have to begin with ourselves in the task of making the light of Jesus shine. We can do so by first uncovering the many task areas within us - our selfishness, weaknesses, hurts and inclinations to greed, power and fame - a life-long process. But as we continue to do so, we are also to bring that light to others. And just as Jesus' ministry blossomed in an unlikely place called Capernaum, we are not to look for an ideal place before we begin this task. We are to bear witness to our faith wherever we are - in our home, school, place of work, marketplace or anywhere.

One spiritual writer's reflections on the details of making the sign of the cross on our forehead, on our lips and on our breast may help us prepare for and exercise our discipleship.

MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON OUR FOREHEAD shows the readiness of our minds to listen and understand the Word of God. Obviously, this readiness to listen is not to be limited to the reading at Mass and the priest's homily. We have to reinforce this with our readings of the Scriptures and other related materials, and then prayerfully reflect on them. Moreover, we have to relate our faith with what is happening to and around us.

MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON OUR LIPS signifies that we do not receive the Word of God only for our personal salvation. Rather, we are to share it with others by word and deed.

MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON OUR BREAST tells us that our proclamation will not be effective unless there is a loving heart behind it. People are to believe in us not because we can memorize bible texts or win in religious debates but because we care for them. It is for this reason, for example, that a person who speaks of the good qualities of others is more easily taken into confidence than someone who spreads gossip. In short, we must show that Christianity is above all a religion of love and concern for others.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this a wake-up call and a challenge for each one of us today that if Jesus came to us as the "great light," we are therefore to be "small lights" to others like Eli in the short story in which he helped others to discover God's loving mercy.