

Can you believe Christmas was just a month ago? We celebrated the birth of Jesus, God with skin on, the Light of Christ coming into the world. Today's Gospel is about how the Light of Christ begins to spread. Jesus starts to gather people into the Kingdom of God with invitations to the first apostles. They were regular people, with flaws. They were attracted to Jesus; they found Jesus to be Light in the darkness. They perceived they were being called to something extremely good.

Then they listened to their hearts. They did something that was not logical or sensible: they dropped their nets and followed him, they dropped business-as-usual. They put it all on the line for Jesus. They leave behind their way of life to follow him. All of their commitments go away with that invitation from Jesus – they got a better offer. They'll become His close friends and will take on the work of spreading the good news of God's kingdom.

As Jesus is Light to the world, so are his disciples. Now Jesus asks us normal folks to be coworkers, to help him build God's kingdom of love and justice on earth.

What can compromise our bringing the Light of Christ to others is if we are satisfied with ourselves, when we think we're nice, we're good enough, we're not so bad. And by the standards of the ancient Roman Empire, that's true. The Church, for all of its faults in history, is responsible for Western Civilization as we know it. Most of the so-called humanitarian values we live by, are Gospel values that come from Christ – not the Roman Empire.

Christ wants us to strive to be our best selves, but the majority of people don't want to live at their best. They just want to get by, to be nice, to be okay, to not hurt anybody. But Jesus wants us disciples to live virtuous lives, to be bright lights, not dim bulbs.

God gave us talents, personalities and opportunities to put at the service of his kingdom. God created us to be saints, to grow in virtue, because virtues enhance our personalities. Virtuous living does not make us dull nerds; being good doesn't make us bores.

Living virtuously lets us set examples of excellence and helpfulness. Then we shine with Christ's bright light, and then people around us will want to know what's different about us, and we can pass on the flame of faith to them. That's happened to me several times, before I was a priest. I've been asked how I can be so joyful, and then I can tell them about my faith – that's how I keep my joy.

The kingdom of God is not on its way; it's already here, here in the ministry of Jesus and in our ministries, where we let our light shine for our neighbor. Let's all of us pray for the grace that we be lights of joy, help, love, compassion and forgiveness for others; that's how we spread the Good News of Jesus and bring more people into the Kingdom of God. We win people over to Christ more by the light of our behavior than by our words.

Fr. John Ozella

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 26, 2020