

HIS LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Each state in the United States, no matter its size, is subdivided into smaller parcels called counties. For example, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania there are 67 counties. We are located in what is known as Montgomery County. This kind of subdivision is not new. In fact, it is very ancient. It was part of ancient Israel fully a thousand years before Jesus was born. What we know as the nation of Israel today is about the size of our own state of New Jersey. Geographically they are about the same size.

In ancient times Israel was divided into twelve areas or tribes. Each tribe was named after one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob, grandson of Abraham and son of Isaac. Jacob had twelve sons. As he was returning to the land God gave to his grandfather Abraham Jacob had a fierce encounter with an angel of God and at the end of the struggle the angel gave Jacob a new name—Israel. So the twelve sons of Jacob became known as the twelve sons of Israel. Each of those sons in turn was given a portion of the land to settle his family. The whole land itself became known as Israel.

We are familiar with one of Israel's sons, Joseph whom his brothers sold into slavery but who became the Chief Supply Officer for the Pharaoh in Egypt and eventually rescued all his brothers. And Judah who was given the land around Jerusalem, where Bethlehem is located and the place where Jesus was born. Two other lesser known sons of Israel were Zebulun and Naphtali. They were given the section up in the north and west part of the country in what came to be known as Galilee. From the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River over to the Mediterranean Sea. The town where Jesus grew up was located in Galilee. It was called Nazareth. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth. He was from the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Now listen to the first reading again: *First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan River, the District of the Gentiles...the people who walked in darkness, they have now seen a great light.*” What is the prophet talking about? What is the great light? Why were these people in darkness? The reference is that this part of Israel had been overrun by pagans, people of no religious faith. The light had gone out of this region of Israel. They did not see. They did not believe. They did not see the light that the people of Israel had been given.

What the prophet refers to in this prophecy is to that time when the Holy One of God will come. From our vantage point of 2000 years after Jesus we believe that He was the light that came. He lived and grew up in Galilee and he taught there and gathered his

first apostles there and performed his first miracles and healings there. For the prophet, the Messiah will be the light of the world and that light will scatter the darkness— everywhere. Beginning in Zebulun and Naphtali.

How does this apply to us today? Where do we see the light? Where does Jesus shine forth in our world? Well, in the Church. For most Catholics the experience of Church is their parish. Our parish is a place of light. His gospel message of love of neighbor rooted in love of God is celebrated here. The message of Jesus which originates in and flows from a heart of generosity, compassion and forgiveness is preached here. Make no mistake about it. This world can sometimes be a dark and foreboding place. We need places of light and beauty and truth where there is genuine goodness and care. Where else do we see such places of light in our contemporary world?

In our Catholic schools is where. Here at Saint Anthony's we are so blessed to be part of a thoroughly Catholic and truly challenging Catholic school Our Lady of Mercy Regional Catholic School over on the grounds of Saint Alphonsus parish in Maple Glen. It is an excellent Catholic school. Every day all 400+ students gather in the gym at the beginning of the school day and with Mr. McGrath their principal they pray together as a school and as a Catholic community. They pray for various intentions and students and families in need.

They have a different virtue that is celebrated each month and students who exhibit that virtue are thanked and saluted for their service to the school community. Classes go to daily Mass. When there is a school Mass celebration they sing. I believe that is an outgrowth of the school's decision to put on a major theatrical production each year. OLM kids love that and they love to sing and act. OLM is also a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon school. Our graduates go onto to all of the leading private Catholic and other high schools and onto all major colleges as well. Many with scholarships. This is Catholic schools week .Please pray for all our Catholic school families and their dedicated staff.

Lastly, your home is the Church in miniature, the domestic church. Your home is also a place of light where the gospel message of Jesus is lived and passed on. Let us pray for each other today that we will remember that Jesus, the Light of the world, does not live somewhere out there. Let us pray that any darkness that has been in our homes will be cast out by the presence of Christ within. Jesus lives right here. In us. Within us. And his Spirit is the source of power that animates us to live the way of Jesus. Let us pray that his light will not only shine upon us but—believing that this light is already within us, that it might shone out from within us for all to see.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.