

January 25, 2026—Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

At the beginning of Jesus' public life, Matthew quotes the great Prophet Isaiah about the ancient lands of Zebulun and Naphtali: **“the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen.”** You may wonder why St. Matthew thought these lands were important to mention at this point in Jesus' ministry. Here is a little history.

After the Jewish nation abandoned their covenant with God by turning to idolatry, they split into two nations, Israel and Judea. A series of invasions led to death, destruction and deportation. The Assyrians attacked Israel in the north; the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to be conquered. Later, the next great power, Babylon, would do the same to Judea, in the south. Isaiah promised that even though they forgot God, He would not forget them; Jesus was fulfilling that promise at the beginning of His ministry by His preaching and miracles in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. Jesus was taking back His land. He was establishing His kingdom. This kingdom was not going to be restricted to any single geographic territory but was to embrace every human soul who would follow Him.

Jesus' first words of preaching were: **“Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are the same thing in the Gospels. The idea comes from the Book of Daniel (7:13ff). Daniel saw a vision of the throne room of God. There he saw **“One like the Son of Man”** presented before the throne of **“the Ancient of Days”**. Remember, Jesus consistently referred to Himself as “the Son of Man”; the “Ancient of Days” is God the Father. Daniel continued, **“Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. That all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. . . . And his kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed.”** The Kingdom of heaven has Jesus at its center.

The CCC (#763) teaches: **“To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church ‘is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery’”**. The Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God present on earth. The Church has an earthly, visible structure, but cannot be limited to what is seen because there is also a supernatural, invisible reality to the Church. She had a humble beginning but is meant to grow as time rolls on and one day be fulfilled and completed in the eternal Kingdom in heaven. We, as members of the Catholic Church are part of that long journey through history and look forward to its

completion. Those first words of Jesus are the message of the Church in every time and to every soul. **“Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

You might think that Jesus as the King and center of the Kingdom of God is obvious. However, the Church has fought throughout the ages to keep her focus on the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Many have tried to downplay His role. St. Paul already experienced it in the Second Reading. Some of the Corinthians were saying, “I belong to Paul”, “I belong to Apollos”, “I belong to Cephus. He reminded them that it was Christ who was crucified for them and they were baptized in Christ.

This past week at the World Economic Forum, which is a gathering of the elite in finance, politics and social engineering, featured a speaker who said that AI will eventually take over all religions. It will master all words and become an expert on all books, like the Bible. AI will become the final arbiter of the meaning of the Sacred Books and doctrines. One commentator said that it will become more important in the future to have printed copies of great books, like the Bible and the CCC, that are authentic and not trust internet versions. We need words to communicate and as important as the Holy Bible is, we are not a people of the Book, but as the CCC (#108) teaches, we are a people of the Word, with a capital W. That Word is the living Person of Jesus Christ who took our flesh to become our Savior and speaks through His Church. We need to get to know and love Jesus as our Friend and Brother, as well as our King and Savior. AI will never be able to substitute a relationship, a friendship or a love for the one we can have with Jesus. It will never be anything more than artificial.

The Gospel today told us that Jesus took up the message of John the Baptist and began gathering the first of His apostles, an important aspect of His visible Church. He didn't begin at the places of power or learning or prestige to find the future leaders of the Church, but began with 4 ordinary laborers, fishermen. At the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John to come follow Him. Later in his Gospel, Matthew tells us that Jesus gave the “keys of the Kingdom” to Peter, in a special way. The Church is the People of God, the family of God, pope, bishops, priests, deacons and the lay faithful gathered around Jesus Christ the King.

We know that the 4 apostles had already met and heard Jesus preach, but on that day, they left their nets on the Sea of Galilee to follow Him definitively. Each of us is called to make a choice, rather make many choices in our lives. Either we

follow Jesus into the kingdom of God, or we follow the prince of this world, the devil. One of the reasons that the worldly hate Christianity and Catholicism in particular, is because to follow Him means more than adopting a new philosophy or new program; it means that we must make a change in our lives and imitate Him.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, many of Jesus' parables begin, "**The Kingdom of God is like. . .**" It is the "pearl of great price"; it is the buried treasure found in the field; it is worth everything to be in the Kingdom of God.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Thy kingdom come.