

Gospel text

Matthew 4: 12-23

12 When he heard that John had been handed over to the authorities, Jesus withdrew to Galilee. 13 And after leaving the city of Nazareth, he went to make his home in Capernaum, a city by the sea, in the territory of Zabulon and Nephtali. 14 And thus came the complete understanding of what had been said by the prophet Isaiah in these words:

15 Land of Zabulon and land of Nephtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of nations
16 The people who were in darkness
Saw a great light,
And on those who lived in regions darkened by death,
A light has risen.

17 From that moment Jesus began to proclaim out loud, "You must set a new direction to your life, for the world of God has begun to reach you."

18 While walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, throwing their fishing net overboard - for they were fishermen. 19 Then he said to them, "Come! Follow me! I will make you fishers of men". 20 Immediately, after having abandoned their nets, they began to follow him. 21 Then, having gone further, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a boat with their father Zebedee preparing their nets. He called them. 22 And immediately, after leaving the boat and their father, they began to follow him.

23 So Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and announcing aloud the good news of the world of God, caring for all the people who were sick or weak.

Gospel commentary - Homily

What light in our darkness?

We are in the eastern part of Pakistan, the center of Muslim radicalism. On some buildings, posters such as this are posted at night: women must wear the burqah and not attend school, under pain of death. Intimidation has increased, as has the killing of teachers, doctors and human rights workers accused of crimes against Islam. Meanwhile, in Islamabad, a 22-year-old woman, Umme Ayman, along with 200 other women, stormed a children's library to protest the government destruction of a radical-led mosque. She said to a reporter, "Allah is for Muslims, not for infidels. Pakistan must be an Islamist state". It is clear that these women are under the yoke of the pro-Taliban clerics of the mosque. Nevertheless, I start to be afraid, to feel chills: and if all that mindset was spilling throughout our world. I only see the darkness around me.

At the same time, I hear about Edhi, Abdu Sattar Edhi, 79, the most revered figure in Pakistan, who daily cleans the dried blood of the corpses in Karachi. Muslim, born in India, he started serving his citizens shortly after the creation of Pakistan in 1947 by opening a free clinic, when he witnessed a horrific scene in which young Muslims struck with knives a Hindu until he bled to death. These Muslims reproduced what certain Hindus had done to theirs. Edhi then bought an old car which served as ambulance or shuttle for the poor people or of transport of corpses for homeless that he washed and to which he gave a dignified burial. No state subsidy, he lives only on donations. His initiative has now become a foundation, with a fleet of 1,380 small white ambulances across Pakistan, led by thousands of volunteers. However, Edhi is fiercely attacked by the mullahs and receives death threats for his attitude towards the infidels, because he welcomes everyone, regardless of their religion: "I am a Muslim," he said, "but my true religion is human rights". There is a light in our darkness.

It is indeed light in darkness that we are talking about in the Gospel of this day "The people who were in darkness saw a great light". We are of course talking here about Jesus, and the experience lived by the first Christians in contact with him, this Jesus who said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near", and which I prefer to translate from Greek by: "You must take a new position in life, because the world of God has begun to reach you". What is this world of God that Jesus is talking about, and that we have a hard time seeing, especially on certain days? How did he start to reach us?

Our great difficulty in seeing this world of God comes from a formidable illusion, that of waiting for this world to resemble a great universal Christianity, populated by good and active Christians, fond of their church. The same illusion explains the existence at the time of Jesus of this community of Qumran, which calls itself the community of "Perfected". They want to live apart with only people who are "pure". And today we see here and there examples of a similar desire through different religious or community groups who only want to bring together the "Good" people.

Watch Jesus well. It was when he heard of John the Baptist's arrest and that he had to move away from the dangerous environment of the Jordan that he began to speak aloud of the world of God. And where does he talk about it? In Galilee, called Galilee of Nations, because it is a place of crossroads of international routes, where Jews and Gentiles rub shoulders, where he meets weak and sick people, after leaving the comfort of his family environment. It is as if it is only in the midst of difficult moments, formidable challenges or painful tensions that this world of God is revealed, as light in darkness. Also think of Edhi who finds his way after witnessing a murder.

"The world of God has started to reach you," says Jesus. Traditional theology speaks of an "already there" but with a "not yet". Why this distinction? Why is this world of God just beginning? The answer is found in the gesture of Jesus who goes to find Peter, Andrew, James and John. God gives the spark plug, strength in the face of the storm, faith in the face of fear. It is up to us to do the rest, like Jesus, like Edhi.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, September 2007