

January 26, 2014 Zebulun and Napthali Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, until very recently a small town in Fairfield County, Connecticut was unknown to virtually all of us. But then a heartrending tragedy occurred which made a once invisible town a national topic of conversation. For generations to come, it is likely we will remember the name of Newtown. The people of that stricken village were plunged into grief and sorrow in the aftermath of the fatal attacks on the schoolchildren of a local school. In preparing today's sermon I was reminded of words found in our scripture reading: "land of gloom", "a land overshadowed by death", "a people who sit in darkness" and "anguish has taken wing". It is worth noting that the people of the village came together for a candlelight service in the days following the horrific incident. The light of the candles pierced the darkness of their gloom and despair. Their hope was restored.

The biblical names of Zebulun and Napthali are unlikely to generate a whole lot of interest among us. Like Newtown, the lands of Zebulun and Napthali are unknown to most in our congregation today. But Christ came to those lands at the onset of his public ministry. Zebulun and Napthali were two of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the eighth century before the birth of Christ, the lands were invaded by their more powerful neighbor to the north, Assyria, who conquered them. Many of their influential and educated men were deported. Thousands of pagan immigrants flooded Napthali and Zebulun. Jews were treated as a captive people.

The Prophet Isaiah announced that one day a bright light will again shine on the peoples of that conquered land. Centuries later, the Evangelist St. Matthew recognized in Christ the fulfillment of the prophecy. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light". This once conquered land would be the first to receive Christ's teaching and prophecy

It is fascinating to note how often the name of light is applied to Christ, particularly in John's gospel. A few samples: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of man", "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" and "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness".

A few personal reflections:

1) There is no greater tragedy than to be deprived of light. Just consider the one who wishes to make an example of his prison. Hoping to break his spirit and lead him into despair, he deprives him of light. He may be thrown into a dungeon, a hole or a box where there is scarcely any light. If allowed to walk, he walks in darkness. In addition he is deprived of any human fellowship. Depriving people of Christ our light is to keep their eyes closed to the truth of God's revealed word. Our secular culture has gone overboard to keep Christ out of view. As a consequence, ignorance, falsehood and error abound. Too many are deprived of sight!

2) Christ wants the light to be burning brightly. This alone explains why he chooses disciples. In Matthew's fifth chapter he declares to his disciples that they are the Light of

the world. We are called to be a light in the darkness. As Christians, we are called to witness to our faith, which at times can be quite challenging. We must not live as the unbelievers and enemies of the faith conduct their lives. We are bearers of Christ's light to the world.

Amen.