

**Ordinary 3**  
**1.25.26**

I don't look forward to this time of year – that is, these weeks which follow the Christmas Season. During the Christmas Season you can drive around the neighborhoods which surround our parish and feel a sense of joy and elation. The lights on peoples' houses make our streets brighter and our hearts lighter. Then, all of a sudden, the Christmas lights are gone. If you drive around those same neighborhoods now, they seem darker, starker, and drearier.

I long to see those lights again. I bet many of you feel the same way.

As Catholics, we know that the lights which decorate the outside of our homes symbolize Christ, born in Bethlehem, who is the light of the world. Celebrating Christ's birth at Christmas makes our lives more hopeful. He has come to take away our sin. He generously shares his life with us, now and for all eternity. How can we not be hopeful when we hear that Good News?

But then we move into Ordinary Time in the Church which we currently observe. Our daily routine seems so ordinary as well. The excitement of Christmas, the sharing of gifts, the time off from work and school, and the opportunity to be with family gives way to something less exciting – work, study, broken toys, and hopeful dreams which seem to have faded away.

The good news is that Christ doesn't give himself to us just at Christmas. He is constantly pouring out his life for us. The spigot of hope is turned on as we receive forgiveness in the

Sacrament of Reconciliation and as we receive his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Christ's hope is found when and where we seek to serve each other. Our hope isn't dependent on the lights which decorate our homes for only a few weeks each year. Our hope is found in Christ himself.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah and the gospel passage from St. Matthew remind us of that reality when we hear these words: *the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.* Again, we know that the light is Christ.

Both of those same readings refer to two towns: Zebulun and Naphtali. These two towns are in the northern part of Israel. In the days of Isaiah, foreign powers took over those towns. The practice of the Jewish faith was suppressed there. The people of those towns began to engage in pagan practices and rejected the faith of their ancestors. As such, faithful Jews from areas like Jerusalem rejected those towns and the people who lived there. Those people were to be ignored, avoided, even despised because of their waywardness.

Many centuries before Christ was born, Isaiah comes along and says something good will happen to the people in those towns. While others ignore, avoid, or despise the race and people that live there, God has not abandoned them. While most believed that those towns and the people who lived there were unworthy of God, God had other ideas. God showed his love for these foreigners and pagans because God created these people. And God cannot hate what he has created. God is literally the eternal optimist – seeking the best for all his children, despite what

others might think of them. The prophecy made by Isaiah about the towns and the people who lived there is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus becomes light for those in darkness as they turn their hearts back to him once again. And that prophecy continues to this day.

Our light doesn't come from what is decorating the outside of our homes. Our light, our hope, and eternal love comes from God who dwells in our parish and in the depth of our hearts.

As God is our light, so too, are we called to share his light with others. On the day of our baptism, our parents and godparents were handed a candle taken from the flame of the paschal candle. At that moment, parents, godparents, and those being baptized are taught that we are to walk as children of the light. We are to bring the light of Christ to the places darkened by sin. We are to let Christ's light shine in the ways we act toward and for others.

In the second part of today's gospel, Jesus calls several disciples by name. He calls those disciples to follow him. Taught and inspired by Jesus, these disciples are to be the light of Christ for others.

Again, on the day of our baptism, we are called by name. It's the first thing that happens at a baptismal ceremony. That moment reminds us that God calls us by name to share the light of his Son Jesus Christ by the way we live.

*\*(One particular way that the light of Christ shines brightly in this community is through our Catholic School. In our school's*

mission statement we even refer to “igniting” one another with the light of Christ by how we learn, play, and live out our faith.

Today we join Catholic schools throughout the United States as we celebrate Catholic Schools Week. Our Catholic school is something to celebrate. It has blessed our local community and the world beyond in incredible ways. Leaders in government, medicine, the military, and the Catholic faith have been formed academically and had their faith nurtured here. In a similar way, future leaders in government, medicine, the military, and upcoming priests and religious sisters are being formed right now in our school.

Hope abounds and our future is brighter because of what our teachers share with their students. Our students, in turn, make this world a better place because of how they live out their Catholic faith.

This is the weekend all parishes throughout the diocese are also hearing about the Catholic Ministry Appeal or CMA. The CMA helps us as we strive to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. Guided by our Office of Catholic Schools and Centers, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic school continues to serve as a bright beacon of hope as it shares the goodness of Christ with our local community and beyond.

The Catholic Ministry Appeal also helps to give shelter to the homeless through Pinellas and Tampa Hope. It educates young the young men like Tyler Gates, Caleb Malec, and Benjamin Kieler as they seek to be ordained priests and serve the people of our diocese. Our support for the Catholic Ministry Appeal is one

way we keep the flame of faith alive for our diocese as well as making the world a better place. This week all of us are being asked to consider what our gift to the CMA will be.

We are right to celebrate our school, because it is such a blessing and gives us hope. We are right to celebrate our school because of the light it is for our community and world beyond. We are right to celebrate our school because it is a source of hope in the present and gives us hope for the future.

May we not just celebrate our Catholic school. But may we live out its values with God's grace. Those values can change the world and make the light of Christ more visible, especially to those who feel overwhelmed by the darkness.)

\*used at the 9:30 am Mass for Catholic Schools Week

One particular way we show the light of Christ is by participating in the Catholic Ministry Appeal or CMS which all parishes in our diocese will hear about this weekend. This appeal is what enables programs like Pinellas Hope and ministries to our youth to operate and thrive (as in our Catholic schools, faith formation, and youth ministries). The Catholic Ministry Appeal helps to form and educate our seminarians who go on to serve us as priests and pastors in our parishes. Both Fr. Joshua and I have benefited from your generous support to CMA through the training we received at the seminary. Our seminarians who recently served in our parish like Tyler Gates, Caleb Malec, and Benjamin Kieler are currently being formed as future priests because of your kindness and generosity.

I so believe in the mission of the Catholic Ministry Appeal that I invest in it myself. Each year I make it a part of my stewardship which supports the Church throughout the Diocese of St. Petersburg. I give a set portion of my salary to this appeal. And I am asking each and every family to do the same.

Most of you have received information in the mail about this appeal along with a pledge card. If you didn't we will provide that same information for you next weekend. Over the next week, I am asking you to prayerfully discern what God is asking you to give to this appeal to help support the good work of sheltering the homeless, forming our children and youth in the faith, and developing young men academically and spiritually to serve as future leaders in our parishes.

Your gift is a significant way that we bring the light of Christ to those who are otherwise in darkness. May God bless you because your generosity to the Catholic Ministry Appeal. And may his light shine brightly upon us because of the sacrificial and generous ways we live out our faith.

Amen? Amen!