

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 23, 2005**

**Isaiah 8:23 - 9:3; 1Corinthians 1:10 – 13,17; Matthew 4:12 – 23**  
**Homilist: Sister Mary Mark Schoenstein**

We who live in our Western contemporary brightly-lit society barely know what darkness is, REAL darkness, complete pitch-black darkness. We can hardly even imagine it.

One winter I was alone making a retreat at Marywood, our cabins in the Santa Cruz Mountains, when the electricity suddenly failed at about 4:30 in the late afternoon. As night fell the whole valley was wrapped in darkness ... no light anywhere among the trees or on the mountain sides ... total impenetrable darkness. I felt so alone.

After a while I saw a tiny light slowly advancing up the hill, step by step, toward the cabin. At the sight of it my heart leapt for joy. How I welcomed old Mr. Fischer with his flashlight who came to check on me and invite me down to their cabin to join them for the evening. That single light pierced the engulfing darkness and assured me that I was not alone or as isolated as I felt.

In Today's reading from Isaiah says: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land or gloom a light has shone" and with that light came "abundant joy and rejoicing."

Through these days of sever winter weather since our Christmas celebration, in face of tragic catastrophe in Southeast Asia, in the daily reports of accelerated violence and hatred in Iraq as the time for elections draws near, in the seemingly hopeless situations in Haiti and the Sudan where people are suffering incomprehensibly, we are indeed a "people who walk in darkness and dwell in the land of gloom."

The only light that shines for us in this darkness is the WORD, Jesus ... God among us ... our only hope. This week as we observe the Church Unity Octave, Paul's words in our second reading ring out loud and clear: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ let there be no divisions among you, but be united in the same mind and in the same purpose." How much more brightly and strongly would that light of Christ shine in our world of darkness if all of us who call ourselves Christian truly lived in one spirit what he has taught us.

Matthew, in today's gospel, tells us that Jesus left Nazareth and began to preach saying: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent! What needs to change to bring about the justice and peace our world of darkness so longs for? What needs to change in each of our hearts? Only the light which Jesus brings, will show us. Are we willing to see, or do we prefer the darkness?