

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME:

Jan. 25, 2026

Both Isaiah and the Gospel today mention the land of Zebulon and Nephthali. So I wondered what was significant about them. The names are two of the twelve tribes of Israel and they inhabited a northern part of the country, which included the Galilee. This was part of the northern kingdom of Israel which separated from the southern kingdom of Judah.

When the Assyrians invaded this northern kingdom, it ceased to exist.

Isaiah seems to be saying that these suppressed peoples would again come into the light of the Lord. And the Gospel shows Jesus doing exactly that. He is bringing light to these northern areas of the land.

The unity and oneness of all twelve tribes of Israel was to be a sign, in God's plan, for the whole human race. We are many but one. Humanity is to echo how we are made in God's image -one God, three persons.

Slavery, domination, colonialism, supremacy of one race or gender or ethnic group, disrespect of migrants are all opposed to Gods' design and to the nature of all creation.

The Church is not meant to dominate other peoples but to be the sign, the model, the example of unity. We know full well that the history of the church shows many failings in this design. The misuse of power as well as patriarchy, clericalism and misguided benevolence have marred the unity prayed for by Jesus.

These kind of problems happened early in the history of the church.

Today's reading from Paul's letter to the people of Corinth bemoans quarrels, allegiance to different teachers such as Paul, Apollo or Cephas. The author calls for the people to be united in the same mind and the same purpose and overcome divisions by adherence to the message of the cross of Christ.

Things are not any different today and possibly worse. Christians, and Catholics in particular, are divided. Some are devotees of John Paul II, some of Benedict XVI, some of Pope Francis. There is a fundamentalist streak in American Catholicism that is unique to our country. We have four Cardinals, and a couple of bishops

publicly attacking the Pope and the Council. There is a small segment, maybe one to three percent, who clamor for the return of the Tridentine Mass. Some are just fundamentalists. Maga Catholics are more interested in politics than the gospel.

Pope Leo, from the day of his election, has striven to promote the unity of the Church. And his concern for the church overlaps into concern for the public state of the world and American particular. Last week the Pope addressed all the diplomats attached to the Holy See. He decried the lack of morality in the public domain. He decried the fact that war seems to be the common response in many places today. He criticized any nation that steps on the sovereignty of another nation.

Though not public, Vatican diplomats were working with others to help move President Maduro from Venezuela to safe refuge in Russia. It was neither good nor necessary Leo said to invade Venezuela.

This past week three American Cardinals, archbishops of major metropolitan cities, addressed a letter to the President about public morality. In this same week the Archbishop who is head of the military ordinariate and is the bishop of all military members and their families said, in answer to a question, that it would be proper for a soldier to refuse to take part in an invasion of Greenland as it would be an illegal and immoral order.

Individual Catholics, of course, have the right to differ with Pope and bishops. Catholic doctrine holds that we are all obliged to follow our conscience. But we must educate our conscience and not just react for emotional or political feelings. Listening to the Pope and bishops should be part of forming one's conscience. Catholic Social doctrine holds up the common good and solidarity, not just individual opinions, as central to our decisions.

It seems to me that it is a good time to be a Catholic but also a difficult time. It is not enough to be good, keep the rules, go to Mass and prepare for heaven. We are all responsible for each other, for our church, for our world. We are called to be awake, alert, aware of what is happening. We are called to be more educated about what we believe and what Jesus Christ asks of us. We are called to get beyond our individual likes and dislikes and come together to be God's people.

At least two principles seem important. First, every one of us, from pope to pauper, from theologian to activist, from grandparent to child, from monk to lay

person, stands humbly before God as a sinner called to conversion and salvation in Jesus Christ. There can be no other ground or principle from which we can approach our various gifts or deficiencies.

Second it is good to recall the kinds of people Jesus chose for Apostles: from the fisherman brothers Simon and Andrew to Matthew and John, they were all flawed but graced. They would go on to heal and preach a kingdom that would draw millions to Christ. And what always helped them to overcome their differences was the sure knowledge that it was in Christ's name they were fishing, not their own.

Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.