

# The Sunday Gospel

## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Lectionary Year A) Matthew 4:12-23

### **About today:**

*Matthew's Gospel presents the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as a decisive turning point in salvation history. After John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus withdraws to Galilee and settles in Capernaum, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." What appears geographically marginal becomes the place where God's light first dawns for the nations.*

*Jesus' proclamation is simple and urgent: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Repentance here is not mere moral correction but a reorientation of life in response to God's nearness and reign. The kingdom is not abstract; it is embodied in Jesus' presence and action.*

*This gospel invites the Church to hear anew the call to repentance, to follow Christ without delay, and to become bearers of the light that has dawned in him for the whole world.*

## **Gospel Reading**

*Read the whole passage slowly a few times, keeping one or two minutes of silence between each time.*

<sup>4:12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.

<sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

<sup>14</sup> so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

<sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles –

<sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

<sup>18</sup> As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

<sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

## **Broader Picture:**

Matthew 4:12–23 stands at a crucial threshold in the Gospel: it marks the formal beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Everything prior to this moment has been preparatory. The infancy narratives establish Jesus' identity as Emmanuel; the baptism reveals him as the beloved Son; the temptation in the wilderness confirms his obedience as the true Israel. Now, in Galilee, that identity moves from revelation to mission. The arrest of John the Baptist functions as a narrative hinge.

In the broader theological picture, this passage reveals the kingdom of heaven not as an abstract future hope, but as a present reality breaking into history in the person of Christ – quietly, unexpectedly, and decisively. It invites us not only to observe the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but to recognise it as the beginning of our own call into the light he brings.

## **Interpretation Notes:**

**v.12:** “...he withdrew to Galilee.” The arrest of John marks a decisive transition in salvation history. Saint Augustine of Hippo interprets this as Christ teaching prudence to the Church – persecution does not negate mission but it can redirect it (*Sermon 293*).

**v.13:** “...made his home in Capernaum by the sea...” This is the lake known as the Sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean. It is also named as Sea of Tiberias (from the city of Tiberias on its shore) or Lake Kinneret.

Nazareth, the place of familiarity, is left behind. Saint Jerome comments that Christ moves from obscurity to openness, from rejection to proclamation (*Commentary on Matthew*). Capernaum, a border town and trade centre, is significant: the Gospel moves outward, towards the nations and the Incarnate Word places himself where peoples and cultures intersect.

**v.13:** “...territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.” Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the twelve Israelite tribes, named after two sons of Jacob, settling in the northern part of the Promised Land, near the Sea of Galilee.

The area was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” due to its mixed Jewish and non-Jewish population, a region considered spiritually “dark” or distant from Jerusalem's religious centre.

**vv. 14-16:** “...what had been spoken through the prophet...” Matthew explicitly frames Jesus’ ministry as fulfilment, not innovation. Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 9:1–2) originally addressed Israel’s devastation and hope; now it is re-read in the light of Christ – the light.

The phrase “Galilee of the Gentiles” signals early on the universal scope of redemption.

**v.17:** “...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the programmatic summary of Jesus’ preaching. Repentance (*metanoia*) is a transformation of mind and heart and turning oneself towards God, not mere remorse for sin. St Augustine links repentance to humility: the kingdom draws near only to those who acknowledge their need (*Sermon 56*).

Saint Gregory the Great stresses that Christ begins with repentance because no one can receive grace without first turning away from sin (*Homilies on the Gospels 16*).

**vv.18-19:** “...Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Jesus calls ordinary labourers, not elites. The image of fishing was interpreted ambivalently by the Fathers: St Jerome sees it as rescue from the depths of sin; St Augustine notes the paradox: fish are caught to die, people are caught to live (*Sermon 100*).

Classic theology sees vocation as grace preceding the merit of the one who is called. The call from Jesus is sheer gift; transformation (“*I will make you*”) is Christ’s work, not the disciples’ achievement.

**v.20:** “Immediately they left their nets...” We can read this as the pattern of discipleship: faith is not calculation about the future but trustful surrender to the Lord, though its practical outworking unfolds over time.

Saint Gregory the Great emphasises obedience here: the disciples do not ask where they are going, they trust and obey the one whom they are following (*Homily 5 on the Gospels*).

**vv. 21-22:** “...they left the boat and their father...” Family ties were important, even sacred bonds at the time of Jesus and looking after one’s parents was part of one’s religious duties. Yet, James and John left the boat and their father. This is because leaving one’s father was not impiety but a sign that God’s call relativises all other claims. St Augustine carefully clarifies that Christ does not abolish family love but reorders it toward God (*On the Sermon on the Mount*).

**v.23:** “Jesus went throughout Galilee...” This verse offers a threefold pattern of Christ’s ministry: Teaching (forming understanding), Proclaiming (announcing the kingdom), and Healing (restoring wholeness).

This is also the foundation of the Church’s mission: doctrine, proclamation, and charity belong together. The kingdom is not an abstract ideology but embodied mercy that brings together the whole of human experience.

## Questions for this week:

- *The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.*  
Where do I recognise areas of darkness – confusion, fear, habit, or weariness – in my own life?
- *Repentance is a turning toward God.*  
What reorientation of heart or mind might Christ be inviting of me at this moment?
- *“Follow me”.*  
What does following Christ mean concretely for me now – not in general, but in my present circumstances, relationships, and responsibilities?
- *James and John leave not only their work but their father.*  
Are there loyalties, expectations, or roles – good in themselves – that may need to be reordered under God’s call?

Scripture quotations are from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Notes by Father Diego Galanzino for *The Sunday Gospel* – A discipleship group of the Parish of All Saints' Houghton Regis, January 2026. [allsaintshr.co.uk/learning](http://allsaintshr.co.uk/learning)