



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time/A
January 25, 2026
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Isaiah 8:23—9:3
Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14
1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
Matthew 4:12-23

If you walk around our neighborhood, or even other neighborhoods in the city – and I do, a fair bit – you will see some version of this written in chalk on the sidewalk: “God is light! Repent!” “God is just. Repent!” “God’s reign is near! Repent!” The sidewalk evangelist is very active in Rogers Park, though I have also seen her or his work in Edgewater and downtown. The first part of the message varies, but the last part, “Repent,” is always there. Of course, it might not be the same person writing all over the city, but the handwriting is remarkably consistent. I am amazed by this person because I have never seen him or her, and their devotion to the task is epic. It’s been going on for at least ten years, and after a rain or snow washes away the chalk, the message is back right away.

Perhaps that is why Matthew 4:17 – “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” – is the line from today’s scriptures and grabbed me and wouldn’t let go. On one hand, it seems like a preview of Lent which begins in a few weeks. On the other, as we hear about the beginning of Jesus’s ministry on this 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, it is an apt summary of what Jesus’s mission was all about. Biblical commentators agree that this call – a repetition of what John the Baptist said as he prepared the people for Jesus’s coming – is a pithy summing up of all of Jesus’s teaching. *The Collegeville Biblical Commentary* elaborates:

“The first part of the message contains the command calling for a complete conversion and reorientation of life. The second part supplies the reason for the command. The definitive display of God’s power and judgment and the establishment of [God’s] rule over all creation are near. In fact . . . the ultimate victory of God is being inaugurated in the ministry of [the] Son.”

I feel like my response to this verse is supposed to be more enthusiastic. It is meant to prompt the quick and unquestioning response of Simon, Andrew, James, and John – prefiguring the kind of obedience Benedict talks about in the Rule. I suspect that this is supposed to be a kind of battle cry for the new year, an inspiration to get going and be about the business of kingdom building.

Instead, honestly, my reaction is some version of “Really?” It has been over two thousand years, and the Kingdom of Heaven does not feel near at all. Yesterday in Minneapolis, there was another murder of another American citizen by our government. On Thursday night, when the temperatures began their descent into sub-zero territory, the City of Chicago did its annual count of unhoused people. Last year they estimated that there were 18,000 of those folks; experts say it is more likely somewhere between 50 and 60, 000. That’s the population of Des Plaines. Here, at home, we struggle to maintain our community life while we try (and try) to discern our future. That’s plenty to repent, but the Kingdom seems awfully far away.

As is often the case, our Psalm response provides my anchor. The response “The Lord is my light and my salvation” is pretty consoling, but it’s the last verse that Judy [Sr. Judith Zonsius] sang that is the key for me today: “Wait for the Lord with courage; be stouthearted and wait for the Lord.” I love the word

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stouthearted. Though courage is rarely a word I associate with myself, I feel more at home with “stouthearted” and its synonym “resolute.” God is good – God is light and justice and compassion, and most certainly, God is love. I know that, and I need to hang on to that knowledge as tightly as I can. When I doubt, I need to change my mind, another way of saying “Repent.”

Perhaps I should get some sidewalk chalk and write “Thanks for the reminder” underneath the mysterious sidewalk writer’s next message.