

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday In Ordinary Time, 2016 C Cycle

**1st Reading:** Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10 [Rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength]

**Responsorial Psalm** Psalm 19 "Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life."

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 – [You are the Body of Christ, and individually parts of it.]

**Gospel:** Luke 1:1-4, 14-21- [The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to bring Good News to the poor.]

*♪ We are many parts, we are all one body,  
and the gifts we have, we are given to share.  
May the Spirit of love make us one indeed.  
One the love that we share, one our hope in despair,  
one the cross that we bear.  
God of all, we look to you, we would be your servants true,  
Let us be your love to all the world. ♪*

That song is very appropriate for this week of prayer for Christian Unity. It also reflects the second reading for today's Mass. The words of Paul give us practical wisdom about how to respond to the Gospel.

Jesus says that he has been sent to bring Glad Tidings to the poor. The words "Glad Tidings" can also be translated as "Good News" or "Gospel." We are called by our Baptism to bring Good News to the poor by being who we are, the *Body* of Christ. I like to paraphrase St. Augustine when I hold up the host and cup before communion, "*Behold the body and lifeblood of Christ. See who you are, & be what you receive.*"

The consecrated bread and wine is only one meaning of the Body and blood of Christ - the original meaning is the one given us by St. Paul in today's reading. We, the disciples of Jesus, are the body of Christ.

When we say "Amen" after receiving communion we are professing our faith that we, together, are the body of Christ, with his lifeblood flowing in our veins. And the consequence of that faith is that we are called and empowered to treat each other the way we would treat Jesus in our midst.

Today - during the Eucharistic Prayer - I will invite you to commit yourself to living the call of your Baptism by singing:

*♪ We are the body of Christ. ♪*

Paul makes it clear that *we need each other*, like the parts of our body need each other. It is also true that the Body of Christ is more than any one parish or faith community. We are all members of his body, not just as individual believers but as communities of believers as well.

And we cannot put down or neglect other parts of the body which are different from us, or weaker or more vulnerable, whether they are individuals or communities.

Jesus quotes from Isaiah in today's Gospel reading. Notice that Jesus unrolls a scroll [like this one], as Ezra did in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading. And he not only reads the passage from Isaiah 61, he edits his own Jewish Scriptures as he reads them. [The scroll would have words from other chapters of Isaiah than 61]

Jesus takes a phrase from Isaiah 58, ["to let the oppressed go free"] which is on the same scroll and includes it in his reading. The last verse he reads is "to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" or "the year of the Lord's favor." He is announcing a year of jubilee. A jubilee year for the Jews of Isaiah's time was a time when slaves are released, debts are cancelled & prisoners set free. This year Pope Francis has proclaimed a Jubilee year of Mercy.

Then Jesus shocks the people in the Synagogue by leaving out the verse that follows:

*"a day of vengeance for our God."*

Jesus is skipping what the people of his home town would think was the punch line of that beloved passage. He refuses to be the messiah so many expected, the one who would bring *"a day of vengeance"* by destroying the gentiles.

Nazareth was a town settled by Jews in a Gentile territory, not unlike modern Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. And when Jesus extended the promise of freedom and healing beyond Israel to the whole human race, as he does in the stories you will hear in next week's Gospel, the people of Nazareth tried to kill him.

If we today are to understand the Bible, both the Old & New Testament, we need to read scripture the way Jesus did. Jesus teaches us in practice how to interpret the Bible. He consistently ignored or even denied texts in his own Jewish scriptures that called for war & hatred for enemies in favor of passages that emphasized inclusion, mercy, and honesty.

He knew what passages were creating a highway for God and which were merely cultural, self-serving, paranoid, tribal, & legalistic additions. Jesus read the scriptures of his synagogue in a spiritual and highly selective way, which is why he was accused of *"teaching with authority & not like our scribes"*.

Jesus wants to make sure that the people from Nazareth & all of us who would become his disciples will live lives of compassion & mercy & inclusion.

Even today, some try to restrict the grace of God to one group or one religious tradition. We are called to overcome that tendency-especially during this week of prayer for Christian Unity - when we celebrate the truth that we share the gift of Baptism with all of our Christian brothers & sisters. And **all who are baptized** are called to do what Christ did - to

*"bring Good News to the poor, proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind.*

*To let the oppressed go free and to announce a year of favor from the Lord."*

This is very clear in the case of the Life issues of our time: The Gospel challenges the culture of violence which makes random killing & mass murder all too common. Any change in attitude or law that lessens violence and killing is *Good News* - especially for those grieving the loss of a child or a spouse or a friend who was killed by gun violence, whether in a school or a movie theater or on the streets.

The Gospel invites us to reform our prison system - which is the largest in the world - so that it is less a school for crime or an instrument of vengeance and more of a place of rehabilitation and prevention of crime. This is a modern way of proclaiming liberty to captives.

I have seen first hand the injustice of that system when I visit someone in prison & help them deal with it, but I have also experienced the love of Jesus who walks with the oppressed & gives the grace to overcome injustice.

The March for Life in Washington that took place last Friday is a way to bring *recovery of sight* to those who have trouble seeing the beauty & value of every human life, from its beginning to its end and at all points in between. And the same blindness to the ineffectiveness and injustice of capital punishment has been challenged by Pope Francis & his predecessors as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church in our own time.

*To announce a year of favor from the Lord* includes the responsibility to care for the earth itself and the unborn generations who will live on that earth - as Pope Francis has beautifully reminded us in his Encyclical, *Laudato Si* - on care for our common home.

The Word of God calls us today to see ourselves and each other as members of the Body of Christ. When we do that, we are beginning to fulfill the call of the Gospel:

The Spirit of God which anointed Jesus in the Gospel we heard has been given to us in our Baptism into Christ: Because we are baptized followers of Jesus, we can sing with him:

♪ *The Spirit of God rests upon me, The Spirit of God consecrates me,  
The Spirit of God bids me go forth to proclaim his peace, his joy.* ♪

Will people be able to look at us, and at this parish and say,  
"Today these Scriptures have been fulfilled in our sight?"

