

4TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, C CYCLE, FEB 3, 2019

1st Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 [A prophet to the nations I appointed you]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 71 ["You are my hope, O Lord"]

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13 [The greatest gift is Love]

Gospel: Luke 4:21-30 [The Good News of healing and life is sent to all]

♪ Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live
A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME,
ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE! ♪

The song echoes the message of Jesus to the people in his hometown. Jesus tells them that the Spirit of God has sent him as a prophet to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to announce a year of favor from the Lord. That was last Sunday's Gospel. In a way, the Gospel of today completes the one we heard last week - they are two parts of the same story.

Jesus was in the tradition of the great prophets of Israel. He comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. The first reading is from one of them, Jeremiah and the 2nd is by another prophet named Paul.

Last Sunday, Paul described a community formed in the image of Christ, a community he calls the Body of Christ. In today's 2nd reading, he sings about the love of Christ which can end divisions. It is often read at weddings & describes a bridge that can endure even in the most difficult stages of a relationship: The love of Christ that embraces the light and the darkness in each partner and each family.

Paul is challenging the people of Corinth, and all of us here, whether we are married or single, young or old, regular church goers or occasional worshippers, to put love first; to "*build a house where love can dwell ...where hearts learn to forgive ...where the love of Christ shall end divisions.*" That's what Jesus is doing in today's Gospel. He is reminding his friends and family in Nazareth, & us here of the message of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah and Elisha that the love of God goes out to **all** people.

Jesus refers to two stories that the people of Nazareth are very familiar with.

The first is the story of how the prophet **Elijah** was welcomed into the home of a poor widow from Sidon (someone who was not a Jew). She was running out of food during a drought. Elijah arrived at her home and asked for something to eat. She told him that there was only enough for herself and her son for a few days and then they will die - but she put her faith in the God of Israel & took the risk to love as she gave him a part of what she had.

The prophet promised that she would not run out of food until the rain returned, and the three of them were able to eat for three years. The prophet even raised her son from the dead by prayer.

The second story is about another *Gentile*, Naaman, a military general from Syria, again someone who was of a different culture and religion than the people of Nazareth. Another prophet, **Elisha**, healed this man of leprosy, even though he was a part of a nation which was, & still is a traditional enemy of Israel. And how did the people react to those stories? They got very angry - an anger rooted in fear and mistrust and a narrow vision of who God could love. That fear, mistrust and anger is still a part of our world. It is used by politicians to get elected & tyrants to oppress the poor; it is used by businesses & corporations to sell guns and security systems.

Sometimes there is as much fear and mistrust & anger towards immigrants to our shores as there was in Israel towards those outside their borders. This fear is sometimes amplified by strident rhetoric and misinformation.

How many of you are the children or grandchildren of immigrants? My Father's parents came from Lithuania, my mother's family travelled from Italy. Jesus crosses over the human borders that divide people from each other and invites all people into the kingdom of God. The church's mission is simply a participation in Jesus' own ministry, which we heard about in last week's Gospel reading: A mission -to bring glad tidings to the poor, - to proclaim liberty to captives & recovery of sight to the blind and -to announce the Lord's desire for human liberation for all people. [Luke 4:18-19]

One of the reasons the townspeople of Nazareth got so angry was that Jesus edits that passage - right after the words "*to announce a year of favor from the Lord,*" the next line in Isaiah 61 is "*And a day of vengeance by our God.*" Jesus omits that line, one that was very familiar to his hearers. In a way, he skips the expected punch line of the passage from Isaiah. What I hear most clearly from the Gospel and from all the readings today is that the love of God described by Paul and Jesus is offered to the **whole** human family.

For Jesus, no one is "other." His words and his life are a clear challenge to a world that still "*others*" people who are different - whether in their race, their culture, their sexual orientation, their political choices or the language they speak. So much of our conversation on TV and on social media is about making a verb out the word "*other.*"

The people of Nazareth were delighted to receive the healing, loving, forgiving word of God for *themselves*, but they did not want that same word to go too far beyond their borders, too far beyond **their** ideas about who could be saved by Yahweh. That's why they got angry with him, and, some say that's why they eventually crucified him. The same thing has happened to prophets before and since. It happened to Abraham Lincoln, to Ghandi, to Martin Luther king Jr., to Malala Yousafzai.

You do not *possess* the love and truth of God as your private good. If God's love can get through to you when you admit your need, the same love is offered to the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the unborn and those on death row, the gay and the straight, the recently remarried & those celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, to Republicans *and* Democrats, to Jews and Palestinians, to Christians and Muslims.

God sent Jeremiah, Elijah, Paul and Jesus as prophets to *all* peoples. The Spirit of Jesus reminds us, the Church of today, *why we were established*. We are called to be Church, that is, to be the Body of Christ, to love one another as Christ still loves us, to be an instrument of God's love, truth and healing to the whole human race. That is why Catholic schools were established, that's the purpose of faith formation for children, teens & adults - to teach us to practice what Jesus preached, to sing in word and deed:

♪ *Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.*

Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;

*Let us bring an end to fear and danger:
ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME,
ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE! ♪*

Here are a few questions to reflect on as you go through your week:

How am I called to live the teaching of Jesus in my day to day life?

Do I recognize the image of God in the outcast, the stranger, the other, and in myself?

How am I called to resist the fear and anger that fills the world
and to embrace the love and truth that Jesus reveals?



My Otter speaks the message of Jesus



Gospel procession