

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, C cycle January 27, 2013

Nehemiah 8:2-4a *Rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength*

Psalm 19 *Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life*

I Corinthians 12:12-30 *You are Christ's body and individually parts of it*

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21 *The Spirit has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor*

**♪ We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly,
We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God. ♪**

Jesus quotes from Isaiah in today's Gospel reading. His mission is to bring good news to the poor - not only to those who have nothing, but to those who sense their spiritual hunger and seek God. He is sent to remind us that we, like him, are called to act with justice, to love tenderly, to serve one another.

But perhaps the most significant part of the Gospel is what Jesus leaves out. He does not finish the last sentence in the passage from Isaiah 61 which he quotes today. In the Old Testament passage, the words that follow "to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord" are "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 passage. He refuses to be the messiah so many expected, the one who would bring "a day of vengeance for our God" 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, the people of Nazareth tried to kill him. He is doing what a prophet does - comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. He does not want the people of his home town to look for a messiah who will make them comfortable, while they ignore the misery of those around them and engage in unconscious (or conscious) oppression of the poor in their midst. He wants to make sure that they look at their own behavior as well as that of their oppressors.

Even today some try to restrict the grace of God to one group or one religious tradition. Perhaps we all need to have our eyes opened. Because we are *all* called to do what Christ did - "*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* for those grieving the loss of a child or a spouse or a friend who was killed by gun violence. This kind of change can give hope that it is less likely to happen again, whether in a school or a movie theater or on the streets.

Reforming our prison system - 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 is a modern way of proclaiming liberty to captives, and of lessening the oppression caused by released prisoners who re-offend.

The March for Life in Washington that took place last Friday was a way to bring *recovery of sight* to those who have trouble seeing the beauty and value of every human life, from its beginning to its end and at all points in between.

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.

How is it possible to live out that vision? The second reading gives us some practical wisdom.

The first way to bring Good News to the poor is to be 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, and be what you receive.*" [words recalled in our time by Pope Benedict]

But the consecrated host 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.* This is what the Catholic Church teaches, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: the Church is "the Body of Christ" and "The People of God."

When a priest or Eucharistic minister gives the host, the official words they are given to say are: "The Body of Christ" or "the Blood of Christ." They do not say, *this is* the body of Christ or *this is* the blood of Christ, because that limits Christ to the Eucharistic bread & wine & can obscure the truth that *we* are the Body of Christ.

That is important because the way we pray affects the way we believe and the way we live. When we say "Amen" after hearing the words, "the Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ" we are professing our faith not only that this is the body or blood of Christ, but 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.

Paul makes it clear that *we need each other*, like the parts of our body need each other. 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. I am very aware as I struggle through the aftermath of the flu, that my voice & lungs are not just parts of me, but that they are so intimately connected to the rest of my body that it affects my whole person.

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.

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: *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.*"

The Spirit of God which anointed Jesus in the Gospel we heard has been given to us in our Baptism into Christ: Will people be able to look at us, and at this parish and say,
"Today these Scriptures have been fulfilled in our sight?"

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