

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, C cycle, Sacred Heart & St Ann's, Margaretville/Andes, NY, Jan. 23-24, 2010

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

Responsorial Psalm 19 [Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life]

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 [We are the body of Christ]

Gospel Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21 [The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the poor]

C 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday 2010 Sacred Heart, Margaretville

□ **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."

Most of the passage Jesus quotes is from Isaiah 61, but a verse from chapter 58 is included as well, "to send forth the oppressed in freedom." How did Jesus read from different chapters? He was reading from a scroll, rather than a book.

In Jesus' time there were pauses after each verse to allow for a translation into Aramaic for those who did not know Hebrew. He could easily go to another part of the scroll during the pause. Even the Rabbis of today unroll a scroll and pick different verses to read from different parts of the scroll.

And what is left out is just as important as what is quoted. Jesus leaves out the words that follow the ones we heard, the words "a day of vengeance for our God," that is, a day when God would punish the Gentiles who were oppressing Israel.

But Why did Jesus choose to read what he did? 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. But Jesus is also skipping what the people of his home town would think was the punch line of the passage from Isaiah 61. 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.

You will hear the rest of that story next weekend, but 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."

How is that possible? 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."

The Roman Catholic Church restored the fullness of this sacrament in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by making it possible to receive the Blood of Christ. [even as the Eastern Catholic churches and the churches of the Reformation have always done]. That was because Jesus said, "*take this, all of you, and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood*" and because it was the universal practice of the first centuries of the church to receive communion by sharing *both* the consecrated wine and the sacred bread.

Drinking from the cup is a symbol of accepting the cross and of hoping for the heavenly banquet. It is a symbol of a commitment to follow Christ to the cross and beyond.

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 and taught by the Church when it calls itself, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "the Body of Christ" and "The People of God."

When the Priest or Eucharistic minister says "the Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ" and we say "Amen," 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, and that you and I are all members of the Body of Christ, sharing his life, 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.

And Paul makes it clear that we need each other, like the parts of our body need each other. We cannot put down or neglect other parts of the body which are different from us, whether they are individuals or communities.

I remember when I broke my ankle. I knew that my ankle was not just helping me do the important "spiritual" work I was called to do, it was so intimately connected to the rest of me that my whole life changed when I broke it, and had to walk on crutches.

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 are in relationship with other communities who believe in Jesus. In Paul's words, "we are all baptized into one body." The week of prayer for Christian Unity ends on Monday, January 25. In many ways we are already members of the Body of Christ described in the reading from St. Paul we heard today.

The Word of God calls us today to see ourselves and each other as members of Christ's Body. The Spirit of God has been given to us through Christ and gives us the power to rejoice in that gift.

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

*□ 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. □*