

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 23, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Nehemiah 8:2-10	We hear the word of God and promise to be faithful.
1 Corinthians 12:12-30	The many members are one in the body of Christ.
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21	Jesus assumes the role assigned for the Messiah.
Psalm 19:8-10,15	God’s word gives spirit and life.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, “What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?” We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Luke:

Today, the Church proclaims the first four verses of Chapter One from Luke’s Gospel. Then, we skip the whole infancy narrative, the introduction to the adult Jesus with John the Baptist, the temptation in the desert, and arrive directly at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee (Chapter 4:14). There, Jesus defines the purpose of his coming by quoting from Isaiah in Chapter 61: “The Anointed of the Lord.”

Luke wants the Church to know that its faith is firmly rooted in the traditions handed down from the very start. Even though the time for Jesus’ return seems to be delayed, by no means has God abandoned his people. Yes, the Temple in Jerusalem is no more. The “Temple” that is the Risen Lord continues, in being in the community of faith. God is still faithful to the promises made in the resurrection and glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke does not imitate Matthew in having Jesus fulfill specific prophecies. Rather, he shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophets in his very person and in all his actions.

“As was his habit,” Jesus went to the synagogue to pray. He is a faithful son of the God who spoke through the prophets. He bases his mission firmly within the tradition of Israel. He honors the Scriptures as the authoritative teaching of his Father. His mission will continue the work of God begun in the Jewish Scriptures.

He chooses Chapter 61 from Isaiah: The Lord will empower and anoint One who is to do in society what God has intended for his people before the chaos introduced by sin brought disorder and confusion. The “poor” will be given every good gift: a restoration of what God wanted in the first place. Unlike the recluses at Qumran who saw here a call to withdraw from a sinful world, Jesus finds in Isaiah an invitation to save the world from itself.

Nehemiah:

While many Jews are still in exile in Babylon (now conquered by Persia), the priest-scribe Ezra and the governor-administrator Nehemiah are sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and the city. More and more of the people return. A restoration of the Jewish faith is undertaken. Primacy is given to the “reconstruction” of the sacred books of Torah from existing fragments and sources. Finally, the Law is proclaimed in the midst of the people. They weep with joy and rededicate themselves to its observance.

Corinthians:

The cohesiveness of the Christian community is often threatened by the diversity of persons and opinions within it. Surely, some persons and some functions are more important than others in the Church, Perhaps the less important are not needed at all? Paul does not agree. The body of Christ has many parts: some more noble than others. But all are needed for the completion of the whole. Diversity does not mean fragmentation. The body of Christ is not divided. Just as there is one Christ, so there is but one Church which is his body.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Imagine the Church stripped of all its power and prestige, of its images and its structures. Its original leaders having died. Is God going to abandon the Gentile Church, too, like he seems to have abandoned the Jewish Christians? (Luke’s Gospel is “good news” for this community of Gentile Christians.) What meaning can that have today for the Church which is being stripped of power and prestige in the marketplace of ideas, in the courts, in legislatures and parliaments, in executive offices of government?

2. Discuss why the early Christian community rejoiced when they heard that the “poor” would hear the “Good News” of salvation. Are we among the “poor” today who hunger for the same message? In what ways are we “poor?” In what ways is the Gospel message a cause for our rejoicing?

3. Notice the role of the Holy Spirit already in Luke’s Gospel: coming upon Mary to bring the Word of God to life in her, leading Jesus into the desert to define his mission, anointing Jesus for his mission. How is the Holy Spirit doing those same three functions in the Church today?

Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Bible word to life in us, in bringing the Word which is Christ to life in us, helping us clarify our mission and anointing us for our mission.

PRAYER

Almighty and most merciful God,
grant, we beseech thee,
that by the indwelling of thy Holy Spirit,
we may be enlightened and strengthened for thy service;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit,
ever, one God world without end.
Amen.

(From the Book of Common Prayer, 1928)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

The times in which we live are also times in which the Holy Spirit comes to anoint the Church for its mission as the body of Christ. At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out by the Father and the Son so that believers might be made fully alive with the energy of Christ himself for the mission that lay ahead of it. The Church was anointed as Jesus was anointed. The Church undertook its mission to the world in the same spirit with which Jesus undertook his mission.

The outpouring of the Spirit continues in the Church as Christ continues to send his Spirit to create the community anew. The missionary work of the Church, the evangelization of those who are called, the re-evangelization of those who are in the Church, the confirmation in faith of all the children of God, the empowerment for ministry which takes place at all times -- all this gives evidence of the continuing coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church.

The Spirit comes in baptism, in confirmation, in holy Eucharist, as sacraments of initiation into the life of Christ in the Church. These sacraments are the primary gateways to the grace of God for the Church and for the world which the Church serves. In and through these sacraments, the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon the members of the Church so they can be empowered to do the works of Christ in the world. These sacraments confer holiness but not primarily for the benefit of the recipient; the grace given is so that it can be given to others.

The Spirit comes whenever the Church prays for that Spirit. The Spirit comes in works of charity and justice. The Spirit comes wherever love is expressed. The Spirit continues the work of creation, the work of re-creating God's universe in holiness and peace.

The Church is not the only area where the Spirit of God is at work.

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