

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2007**

What is the identity of Christian community? What makes the Church to be a community of believers than a simple club of friends or a human association? According to the readings of this Sunday, it is around the word of God that the Church builds its cohesion and founds its unity as a community of believers.

The book of Nehemiah recalls what the priest Ezra did to maintain the cohesion of the people of Israel after they returned from the exile in Babylon. That period was a very difficult time where the sons of Israel, after having lost a lot of their heritage, lived in confusion and conducted themselves improperly with regard to God's covenant.

Ezra gathers the whole people around the book of the law of God in a moment of joy and acclamation. He reminds them all of the mighty deeds God has done and his faithfulness that never fails. Even if they are now disoriented and live in confusion, God is still with them; he has not abandoned them. After all, with God no darkness is deep that the light cannot appear; with God no night is so long that the sun cannot rise. Despair is not Christian; only hope is Christian.

This message of Ezra is important and encouraging to us today as we come across many problems and conflicts in our lives. It teaches us that the word of God addresses the concrete situations of suffering and misery that God wants to transform into a moment of joy and gladness. It invites us not to weep, but to hope the day the Lord will visit us in our trouble.

All this helps us understand what is at the stake in today's Gospel as Jesus makes his first proclamation of the word in the synagogue. From the outset, Luke situates his Gospel as an account of historic events that took place in the middle of the people of Israel. It is not a human invention; rather it is a faithful transmission of what has been received from the eyewitnesses from the beginning, that is, the ministers of the word.

The purpose of this sequence is to assure us who believe that Jesus Christ is not a myth, or a legend or a tale. He is a true historic person who lived in Galilee at a well-known time, who taught in their places of prayer, and who was admired of all. Consequently, we have to trust him and listen to him, because in this man, God has a plan of salvation for us and for our world.

It is this plan of salvation that Jesus tries to explain in his public apparition as he preaches in the synagogue of Nazareth where he grew up: "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing", he says. In fact, Jesus points to himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah and the longing of Israel in the awaiting of the Messiah.

The Father has sent him to bring consolation to the afflicted and comfort to the needy. His presence in the world is an inauguration of a time of grace and visitation from God. He is endowed with the Holy Spirit by the Father to set free those who are under oppression and live in suffering. This time is a time of liberation and blessing, where the victory over every kind of oppression is

offered, where all the chains of servitude will be broken, all disease healed, and the poor will finally be able to rejoice and be happy.

As we listen to this program of Jesus' mission, let us remember that "Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday, and he will be the same tomorrow". May we bring to him our problems and conflict, all that weighs on us as burdens we cannot manage ourselves! He is able to rescue us and make our burdens easy, because this is the reason why he was sent into the world.

This mission of Jesus is destined to everybody, because all are God's people in spite of the diversity of their culture, nation, race and language. That is what St Paul reminds the Corinthians. The comparison he uses in this regard is really eloquent: the body may have many parts, but all make up only one body. So are the Christians in Jesus Christ. "For in one spirit they were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit".

If we are diverse, but one people, this has consequences for our life in the Church and in society. First of all, the Church is a gathering of people of all nationalities, races and languages. In this respect, each one should be welcomed and fill home, independently of his cultural or intellectual background. Second, there is the idea of unity in diversity. Of course, we are all different, and yet we are one people. In other words, our differences should not be an occasion of division and tensions, but of building together this body of Christ we are called to be. Our differences should help enrich one another as we take advantage of the gifts others bring in our midst. Third, we are complementary and not antagonists. We need one another, as individual and as community, like the hand that needs the eye, or the ear that needs the foot, in order to allow the body to function in good shape and good health.

Finally, we have to live in solidarity with one another, as individual and as a community. St. Paul renders it as he says, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy". This means, in fact, that for our spiritual growth and for the well being of our society, we have to work together, excluding all pretensions of focusing only on own proper agendas. We have to maintain a vision of a whole of which we are part. It means also that we have a responsibility, not only to ourselves, but to the whole body of mankind. In practice, it means that, we have to see ourselves as guardians of our brothers, we have to make the problems of our society our own problems; global issues should be our issues.

Let me finish by saying that at the heart of Christian community is the word of God. This word brings us together as one people in spite of our differences and charismas. For that reason we have to care for one another as Christ did for us. May God bless you all!



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