

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The word of God is at the center of our life as Christians and disciples of Jesus. It is the word of God that guides us and inspires us in the many things we do as Christians. Without the word of God, it would be difficult and even impossible to distinguish the Christian community from other gatherings, like a football club or an association of friends. All the readings of this Sunday invite us to reflect on the importance of the word of God and its value in the building of the unity of the Christian community.

The first reading describes what the priest, Ezra, and the Scribe, Nehemiah, did in the aftermath of the exile in order to rebuild the unity of the people and to reconstruct the country. As a matter of fact, the return from Babylon was a very difficult period. Much of what the people intended to do did not work as planned. Everywhere frustration and discouragement grew. But, by their action built around the word of God, Ezra and Nehemiah came to reassure the people of God's faithfulness and reestablished the religious worship in the restored and populated cities.

On hearing the word of God read and explained to them, the people wept because of their sins and the punishment that came upon them. But, Ezra comforted them and invited them to rejoice because that day was a day of the Lord, a day on which they came to hear again the words of the law. Instead of being sad, they had to rejoice because the Lord was their strength and their redeemer.

As we can see, the word of God that the priest Ezra read to the people was from the Old Testament. When the times were fulfilled for God to send his Son into the world to be the savior of mankind, that word was completed with the actions and the sayings of Jesus Christ. It is to that word that St Luke gives witness in today's Gospel.

From the outset, St Luke states his intention to write down an orderly narrative of the events that took place in their midst after investigations and inquiring of the eyewitnesses. This passage seems to me crucial for understanding the relationship between research and inspiration. In fact, some people are used to opposing research and inspiration. No one, however, will deny that Luke's Gospel is inspired, and yet he starts by saying that it is the product of historical research. As it can be seen, God's inspiration does not come to those who sit with folded hands and lazy minds, and wait; but to those who think, seek and search. True inspiration comes when the searching mind joins the inspiring Spirit of God.

This being said, it is clear that Luke's intention is to tell us that the Gospel is not a human invention. It is an account of historic events that took place in the middle of the people of Israel. It is a faithful transmission of what happened from the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee up to his death on the cross.

The first consequence to draw from this statement is that Jesus Christ is not a myth or a legend. He is a historic person who lived in Galilee at a well-known period of time, who taught in open places of prayer, and who was admired by all. If that is the case, we have, therefore, 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 appearance as he preached 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.

First of all, the fact that it was Jesus’ habit to go to the Synagogue on the Sabbath is already challenging to us. In fact, there must have been many things with which Jesus disagreed, and yet he went into the Synagogue. Everything of what was said and taught might not be perfect, and yet Jesus never missed an opportunity to join himself to God’s people in order to listen to the word and worship God.

What was the plan Jesus received from the Father? 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 God’s visitation. He is endowed with the Holy Spirit in order to set free the oppressed and bring healing to the sick. This is a time of liberation and blessing, where the chains of servitude are broken, the clamors of disease are healed, and the sufferings of the poor are destroyed.

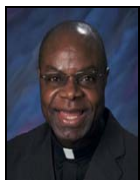
This mission of Jesus is for you and for me who have believed in him. You and I are just one people, as St Paul reminds us. We might hate each other for some reasons, but we cannot undo the truth that we are destined to be together. In spite of our differences and the diversity of our culture, nation, race and language, we are all the body of Christ. Whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, we were all baptized into one body and were all given to drink of one Spirit.

By the way, what makes a body to be beautiful? Not the hand separately, or the eyes, or the arm, or the nose, or the face, but the ensemble to which it belongs and which is constituted by all the parts. In the same way, 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.

All that brings us to the idea of a whole: we are part of one another. “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy”. Our spiritual growth and well being in the Church and in society depends on our integration and our understanding of what it means to be a community. Always remember that the mean-minded and secret wars do not build a community, but destroy it. What we need is a vision of a whole of which we are a part. We are responsible for one another before God and before our conscience.

Let us ask Christ to make us strong around his word of life as one people. Let us ask him to help us appreciate one another and not to fight one another. Let us appreciate the charisms of our brothers and sisters and put them at the service of the Church. God bless you all!

Nehemiah 8, 2-4a, 5-6’ 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12, 12-30; Luke 1, 1-4, 14-21



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