

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019**

The readings of this third Sunday of Ordinary time talk about the importance of the word of God and its value. They show that the word of God is at the center of the life of the people of God. They invite us to build a strong community around the word of God.

The first reading of the book of Nehemiah recalls what the priest Ezra did in order to maintain the unity of the people of Israel after their return from exile in Babylon. It shows how he gathered all people, men, women and children in age of understanding around the stipulations and the regulations of the Law of Moses.

It equally recalls the reaction of the people he blessed with the word of God, how they accepted it with one heart and one spirit. After that, the text reminds how Ezra exhorted them and encouraged them to be happy, as the Lord was in their midst.

What is behind this text is the idea that the word of God contributes to the unity of his people. Another idea is the truth that the word of God sets the obligations we have to fulfill toward God as the reliable partner in the covenant with him. The last idea is related to the truth that God joins us in the concrete situations of our life, which he wants to transform for our good.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus makes his first proclamation of the word in the synagogue. First of all, the Gospel describes the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an historic and verifiable event that took place in the midst of the people of Israel. It says that it was that story that Luke wrote down so that we have it in orderly sequence.

Then, it shows that the Gospel message is not a human invention, but rather a faithful transmission of a true story received from the eyewitnesses who were with Jesus from his beginning to the time of his ascension into heaven.

Finally, the Gospel speaks of the presence of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth where he was preaching with authority under the power of the Holy Spirit who was in him.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the primacy of the word of God. That primacy I want to affirm in terms of three claims I formulate. First claim: The word of God we have written in the New Testament is a true story and not a fiction. It is about a man, Jesus Christ, who came from God with a special mission to save the world. Jesus is not only a man; he is God.

When Luke says that, after having investigated the accuracy of the events that took place in their country and has written them down in an orderly sequence, he is establishing the historicity of Jesus as a public figure in the Jewish society.

One of the consequences from this claim is that Jesus Christ is not a myth; he is not a tale. He is a historical person who lived in Galilee at a well-known period of time of Jewish society, who taught in their places of prayer and who was admired by the people.

In other words, history recognizes that Jesus was unique both through his teaching and his action. That uniqueness comes out of the fact that he was not only a son of Mary and Joseph, but also the son of God. As a son of God he has received a special mission from God the Father, namely to bring joy to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, consolation to the afflicted and healing to the sick.

Second claim: What Jesus did in the Synagogue of Nazareth was to spell out clearly the mission received from the Father so that there might not be doubt about him. That is why he attributes himself the words of Isaiah 61: 1-2.

By doing so, Jesus wants to tell us that what we hear about him has been announced long time ago by the prophets. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies. Therefore, it is in our interest and for the sake of our eternal salvation to listen to him and act upon his teachings.

His is the mission of doing good to people. The Holy Spirit has anointed him so that he becomes a source of hope and joy for those believing in him. In modern terms, we can say that his mission is that of making a difference in the lives of people who meet him.

He has come in order to transform the history of individuals and people so that all may find a reason to hope and live again. He stands in the middle of the history of people and individuals in order to give them joy and consolation. Our own personal and collective history cannot find its true meaning outside Jesus. As long as we have not found Jesus, we stay away from a source of peace, freedom and healing that only God can give.

Last claim: It is in the gathering of the people of God that the word of God is lived. The gathering of the people of God is what we call the Church, the community of the believers. It does not mean, however, that the word cannot be lived individually, because what people live in their own life is what they bring to the community.

For that reason, St Paul insists on the importance of the community that he compares to a body. Our spiritual growth and well being as a Church depends on our integration and our understanding of what it means to be a community. As the hand cannot be separated from the arm without harming the whole body or the eye from the face without disfiguring the individual, we cannot exist without one another.

Positively, it means that we need one another, like the hand that needs the eye, or the ear that needs the foot, in order for the body to be in good shape and function in harmony. Our personal gifts and talents are beneficial to our fellow Christians. We cannot keep our gifts for ourselves without harming the fellows and the community.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to understand that we have to stay united with one another around the power of his word. May he help us to use our different gifts and talents for the good of our fellow Christians! May God bless you all!

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



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