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“Jesus’ Homily in the Synagogue”

Third SUNDAY, 2019, C

Nehemiah 8:2-10; I Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 4:14-21

Scripture Background

When Jewish exiles were released from Babyon to return to the homeland, they needed to rebuild: the city, its wall, its Temple.

This occurred in the sixth century before Jesus.

There is an account of this in the book of Nehemiah that we read today.

It describes a major event: which is a community ceremony of reading.

That’s how the renewal of Judaism took place, through reading and remembering and coming to believe again the great story.

The book that is read is referred to as “the Law.”

But the Law includes the whole history of Genesis and Exodus, the religious and domestic customs, and the 10 Commandments.

These foundational stories of the patriarchs, of Moses and the Kings, gave meaning and coherence to the life of the people.

Today’s Gospel gives an account of Jesus worshiping in a synagogue and stepping up to read.

But he was given a different part of the scripture, the prophet Isaiah.

The prophets are not the history of Israel, nor the ritual law, but are rather an account of God’s voice for the present and future, what is God’s purpose now, unfolding in our lives.

So Jesus stands with the prophet, as a prophet himself, to understand his own purpose under God.

We also continue to listen to the great letter of Paul to the Corinthians, written centuries ago, but a foundation of our understanding of

who we are, the body of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit’s gifts are the foundation of present and future.

HOMILY

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ “public ministry” begins in a synagogue.

With a moment when he is asked to read, from Isaiah.

In the pages of Isaiah, he chooses a place that directs our attention to the new arrival of God among us, the Spirit of liberation. He feels this deeply; he knows the Spirit. At his baptism the spirit came upon him, and then filled with the spirit he went to the desert and he returns now led by the spirit. His comes to know his messianic purpose from the prophets, not the stories of the patriarchs or Moses or the Kings. This is his connection to what God wants to do. This is the spirit of God poured out, a new creation.

And he lets it be known that the Spirit has a special care for the poor, the imprisoned (who were often the same group) and the blind, the hindered, those who are marginal. these are the people whose voices we don't often hear, people whose lives don't force their attention on us, the working poor, janitors, immigrants legal or illegal, children too, society's little ones. We hear about them but don't often meet them.

The Spirit will instigate also a new kind of freedom, releasing people who are in debt, who are bound by bad laws, prisoners of conscience or many kind of addicts and demon possessed. The overturning of power here allows the marginal people to become central, and this is bothersome because our world gets thrown off balance.

But many of you know about this, how the parish has taken on something of the Jesus mission by paying attention to the voices of the marginal, the ones who call and leave messages on our Vincent dePaul line. The families we meet working to build homes through Habitat; or the Crispaz groups in Central America we often visited maybe ten years ago, or the young women in Guatemala who are the ministry concerns of our parish friend Joyce Kahle, a Sister of Precious Blood many of you know. Or I think of our members who even now are visiting the border stations with Mexico. All of this we take for granted.

All of this is an effort to bring the unheard voices central to listen to them, to let the downtrodden at least

have their story and the respect of the larger world.
I have experience of that in hospital visits,
and lately in some volunteer work
with the mentally ill in a therapy group I sit with.
The goal is always to hear the story,
and the dignity that comes from this,
when a person is heard, and healing starts just from that.
It is a real work of spirit.
It changes your sense of who is important in your world, our world.
It might be happening in your school classroom
or your family home.

I bring this up not to call you to committee work,
or to expand your political interests,
but just to get a feel for what is released in the Gospel:
the mind of Jesus Christ at the beginning of his era.
It is an inclusive mind, an all encompassing heart.
As you come to know the mind of Christ
you may find we too are included:
the broken among us, the jobless, the ill, the divorced,
the weary, the regretful. All wonderfully included.

AND, you find parts of yourself that you haven't heard from lately,
your own marginal aches and regrets, where we too
are addicted, alone, resentful, unlikeable, poor and captive.
But we are not shut off from the powerful announcement of the Christ
opening the scripture, and finding his heart moved by who we all are.
"The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives,
recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim a year acceptable to God. A time of healing."

I came upon a short statement, a wisdom teaching
that has helped me see my own world better, and the mission of Christ.
It states simply: "healing is the absence of separation."

Healing, the whole work of the Gospel, is the absence of separation.
Another way to put it is that separation is the real evil among us.
Divisions and boundaries create a time of broken hearts,
an impoverished society.

So it is that Jesus said on that morning in the synagogue,
“The Spirit is upon me now, for the sake of all of us.
To open our eyes to an undivided world that beckons us.
This purpose is extended to the least of humankind,
to all our messy struggles. This is the acceptable time. 2019.
So we no longer need to keep ourselves hidden.”

It was that morning, as is often said,
he gave the world's shortest homily:
“Today this good news has been fulfilled in your hearing.”
So let it be.