

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 24, 2010 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it — for he was standing higher up than any of the people —; and, as he opened it, all the people rose. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, “Amen, amen!” Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground. Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all the people: “Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep”— for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15

(cf John 6:63c) **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul;
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;
The ordinances of the LORD are true, all of them just.

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart
find favor before you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Brothers and sisters: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, “Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, “Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were

hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.” Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Two men unroll papyrus scrolls and read them to the people. In each case, their proclamations signal the beginning of a vast new era. One is Ezra the scribe, and the other is Jesus of Nazareth. Four centuries separate them. We find Ezra in the [First Reading](#). He is in Jerusalem after the return of the Jewish exiles from captivity in Babylon. What captivity in Babylon, you ask? Perhaps it will help to have more of the story. Ancient Israel was captured by the Babylonian empire 586 years before Christ. The Babylonians took Jerusalem itself. They demolished the great temple built by Solomon centuries before. They deported the majority of productive citizens to Babylon, leaving peasants to run the holy city if they could. After fifty years or so of their captivity, Cyrus the Great, king of Persia (now Iran), came into possession of Babylon and he let the captives go. Many had switched their faith by this time in favor of foreign gods and customs, but the remainder, perhaps 5000, made ready to return. A lot of them had been born in captivity and so had never even seen Jerusalem. There were great caravans returning home. Ezra—priest, scribe and teacher—led one of them on the four month journey across the desert. They arrived to find Jerusalem a ruined city with widespread moral decay.

Reconstruction of a city or a country is immensely difficult, as we know from watching Iraq, Afghanistan and New Orleans in our own day. Ezra worked long and hard to bring back the ecclesiastical and civil fiber of the nation. At last a new temple was finished in 516 BC, and the ruined city walls were rebuilt. Ezra stood up on a high wooden platform so he could be heard and seen, and he “read plainly” from the papyrus that held “the book of the law.” He started at daybreak and continued until midday. Not only did they have their city again, but also they had heard the Word of God again, and finally there was again a temple where they could worship. The new era had begun.

Four centuries later we find Jesus making a similar return into Galilee, the region where he grew up. He has just been baptized and has spent time in the desert. Now, “in the power of the Spirit,” Luke says, he journeys back to his home town of Nazareth. Like Ezra, he takes up a papyrus scroll, this one containing the book of Isaiah—much of which, coincidentally, had been written during the Jewish exile. This action in the synagogue is the first one of his public life. He proclaims that the Lord has sent him to “bring glad tidings to the poor . . . , to let the oppressed go free,” to proclaim a time of favor from the Lord. This is what Ezra and Nehemiah had done, but Jesus' mission is much, much more. A far greater new era has begun. He sits down, now at the same level as the people: he is in their midst. He says almost casually, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” His mission is to rebuild their hearts, not just their city, to return them to God, their home. Would they accept this startling new kind of epoch? Will we? Stay tuned for more next Sunday.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Why does Ezra say “today” is holy? What is significant about “today” for Jesus? Do you live in the past or the future? What is the only time you have for sure? What happens to “now” if you spend all your time looking backward or forward?
2. If you had your choice of gifts which ones would you choose? Why? If you have a gift and you never use it, what will happen to it? Can you name some of your gifts?
3. Jesus said he had been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. Where would you look for Jesus if he were here today? Is the Church where you would seek him? Do you insulate yourself from the poor and tell yourself that you couldn't do anything to help anyway? Is there some small thing you could do for people needing assistance?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct your love that is within us, that our efforts in the name of your Son may bring mankind to unity and peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen