

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 23 January 2022

Scriptures: Nehemiah 8:2-10; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the opening lines of today's Gospel, Luke explains his writing project: He intends to present an "orderly account" of what he has discovered from his research about Jesus.

We then skip forward a few chapters and hear Jesus proclaim his understanding of what he has been called to do.

Now, and through the rest of the coming liturgical year, we are being invited to come to know Jesus as Luke knew him. The journey will be challenging.

In today's Gospel, Luke manages to pack a lot of information in the set-up for Jesus' inaugural statement at Nazareth. He is so intent on emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit that by the time we get to these verses, he has already cited eight different occasions in which the Spirit has been active.

So, with Luke's introduction, we know that Jesus is under the influence of God's Spirit and that he is a faithful Jew accustomed to praying with his people in the synagogue. We also learn that Jesus quickly became a rather famous character in the region.

That's the set-up for today's Gospel story which is presented as a carefully described solemn liturgy of the Word.

We can almost imagine the scene. We're in a small village where there is not usually a lot of novelty. A hometown boy who surprisingly turned out to be the town's prodigy, returns to his own backyard. Like one of the regulars, he joins everybody in the synagogue and offers to do the reading. There must have been some mixture of pride and curiosity as the man in charge handed

Jesus the scroll, and probably some murmurs of approval as he chose what to read from the prophet.

We know what it's like to be in that situation. Every time we hear the proclamation of God's wonderful promises, they comfort and console us.

In a sense, hearing a reading like this from Isaiah is a little like listening to Christmas carols with all their magic. It's spiritual. It awakens our consciousness of God's wondrous promises and helps us to accept the troubles of the present moment.

Jesus went back into the tradition and enumerated their fondest hopes and memories. God would care for the poor exiles, and the captives would come home. No one would walk around paralyzed, and everyone would see the truth.

If the story had ended there, all would have been well. Jesus' fame would spread and he would be praised all around.

But he broke the routine. His synagogue community may have been waiting for a beautiful prayer for deliverance or a teaching about how God had worked through Moses and David and all the other heroes. But no. That wasn't what they got. Jesus sat down and looked at them and said, "Today".

That was where he stopped. "Today, this passage is fulfilled". The Gospel ends there.

"Today" is the explosive word in this Gospel. It calls forth more than the drama of repentance and celebration we heard about in the reading from Nehemiah. It actually demands that we live out the call that Paul gave the Corinthians—to be the body of Christ.

These readings leave us sitting with the Nazareth community.

The Gospel is designed to stun us. To disturb us. To make us squirm as we hope for a different ending. But we won't get it. "Today"—that's it.

If we take these scriptures seriously, we find ourselves sitting face to face with Christ, who looks us in the eye and says: "Yes, today". "You are my body. You have all the gifts necessary. Look around you—right now, look around. These are the people called with you. Today."

Christ tells us that we will never be more ready for the poor, the captives, the refugees, the blind, and the oppressed waiting for each one of us just outside the door. Right now, they are waiting for us. Today, Jesus calls each one of us to serve those in need. And, he calls us today.

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