

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time —Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Reading 1

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

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15

R. (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.

R. **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

R. **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart
find favor before you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

R. **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

Reading 2

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, "

1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (Continued)

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?

Or

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27

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.
You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

Alleluia

Cf. Luke 4:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
and to proclaim liberty to captives.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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."

Exegesis

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

Nehemiah and Ezra were two of the most influential leaders during the Restoration Period, the period that followed the Exile. It was a time for the Israelites to rebuild their city, their temple and their lives. Nehemiah was a prominent leader, a lay person, who was involved in the reconstruction process, especially rebuilding the city walls. Ezra was a priest, and scribe of the Law, that traced his lineage to Aaron, the brother of Moses.

Although the exact date of our pericope is uncertain, it is believed to be early in this rebuilding process. It was during the Exile, the Diaspora, that synagogue services were thought to have begun. With the city and the temple destroyed the synagogue became a place for the people to gather, hear the word of God and to worship. During the decades of the Exile, it was the word of God that united the people and kept their faith alive.

In our story today the people are gathered to hear the Pentateuch read and proclaimed by Ezra, the priest. While the people are cut to the heart, Ezra encourages them to rejoice in the Word. It is out of love that our God gives us rules to guide our lives and to lead us to Him. In the words of the Psalmist "The Law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul." God is present in the Word proclaimed. The scroll was used to bless the people who felt awestruck in the presence of God. They were instructed to rejoice in so great a God that chooses to visit His people to communicate with them and to lead and guide them. They responded, "Amen."

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15

Psalm 19 is titled *God's Glory in the Heavens and in the Law*. It consists of 15 verses. The first seven verses proclaim the glory of God in His creation, often referred to as a *Creation Psalm*. Verses 8 through 15 proclaim the glory of God in His Law. The Law of God is perfect, refreshing, trustworthy, giving wisdom, enlightening, clear, pure, enduring, true, just, desirable, and as sweet as honey. Omitted verses 13 and 14 are penitential, asking God for forgiveness for failure to obey His Law.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. It is important to note that the word *fear; yirah* in Hebrew can connote craven fear as we know it. However, most often in reference to fear of God in scripture it refers to a sense of awe or reverence in relationship to God. It evokes a sense of the creature standing before his creator.

Omitted verse 11, speaking of the Word of the Law, describes it as *More desirable than gold. Than a hoard of purest gold, sweeter than honey or dripping from the comb.* This evokes the words of the Prophet Jeremiai who devoured the Scroll of the Law and found it as sweet as honey. (Jer 15:16).

The message is that the Word of God must be received and internalized in order for it to fulfill its purpose. In the words of Jesus, "Fulfilled in your hearing."

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

1 Corinthians Chapter 12 is titled *Spiritual Gifts – Unity and Variety*. Our pericope is introduced by verse 3: “Therefore I tell you that nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed.’ And no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” In our pericope today St. Paul gives us the beautiful image of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. It is titled One Body, Many Parts. “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.” (1 Co 12:12). Later Paul further clarifies this image: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individual parts of it.” (1 Co 12:27). The Risen Lord, Himself, makes no distinction between His Church and His Body as He appears to Saul and asks the question, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” He did not ask, “Why do you persecute My Church?” Perhaps St. Paul evokes this image of the Church as the Body of Christ from that very experience.

Paul is addressing divisions in the church at Corinth. He has just addressed in the previous chapter, abuses relative to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper should be the celebration of unity and not a cause for division. Now Paul is addressing dissension caused by an egocentric competitiveness among members of the Church. Paul advises that since all the gifts of the Spirit have a common origin, they should serve a common purpose.¹

St. Paul follows this passage with his famous treatise on love, the greatest of the Spiritual gifts.

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 810.

Exegesis (Continued)

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

Our selected Gospel passage includes the introduction to Luke's Gospel and then jumps to Chapter 4, verses 14-21. The introduction connects the *Gospel of Luke* with *The Acts of the Apostles*. The movement of the Holy Spirit flows through the narration of the Gospel and continues with an unbroken chain in and through the Church in *Acts*. As the Holy Spirit flowed in and through Jesus it continues to flow in and through Christ's Church.

At His baptism "the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove." (Lk 3:22). Then "Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil." (Lk 4:1). And now "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of Him spread throughout the whole region." (Lk 4:14). When Jesus quotes from the Prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," He announces that He is the fulfillment of that prophecy. The words of Jesus capture Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6.

He was teaching. Teaching was certainly a focal part of the ministry of Jesus. Luke reveals Jesus teaching numerous times. See 4:31; 5:3, 17; 6:6; 13:10, 22; 9:47; 20:1; 21:37; 23:5 and Acts 1:1.

For He has anointed Me. Jesus is referring to His Baptism. Luke uses the Greek word *chrío* for *anointed*. It is a form of the word *Christos* that we translate as *Christ* or *Messiah*, i.e., *the Anointed One*.

You have heard. The literal translation of the Greek is *in your ears*. Mary heard the words of the Angel with her ears but had to ponder them in her heart. The Word of God has an amazing power but is only fulfilled in our reception of it. That reception may begin with the ears but must be received in the heart as well. God desires to speak to each one of us in a very personal way, but it must be received by each and every one of us in a personal way as well.

A note for preachers. St. Augustine once said, "If I speak with my mouth people will hear with their ears. If I speak with my heart people will hear with their hearts."

Our Gospel passage today reveals Jesus as teacher, as the Spirit anointed Messiah, as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and as the herald of the Good News.

Reflection

Spirit and life and rejoicing are words that run through our scripture this weekend. The setting of the first reading from the Book of Nehemiah is Jerusalem. The people have just returned from three generations of exile in Babylon. They returned to a disaster zone of rubble from the city walls that were destroyed and from the demolished temple that took nearly 50 years to build. They were brought to tears by the horror that they found, but those tears were soon turned into rejoicing as they rediscovered their identity as a people, a people of God, with a purpose in God's plan. They found themselves in the Word of God that was being proclaimed. At that moment the Word of God became personal, it became spirit and life in them and great rejoicing followed. There is an amazing joy and peace that comes in discovering meaning and purpose for life, life in God's eternal plan, His plan of love and peace and mercy and salvation.

The Gospel is the beautiful beginning of Luke's two volume work which continues with the Acts of the Apostles. After the introduction of the Gospel, we fast forward to the scene of Jesus in the synagogue that marks the beginning of His public life and ministry. Jesus stands up and is handed the scroll and He finds the passage in Isaiah of which He is the fulfillment: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me..." The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and by the power of the Holy Spirit she gave birth to Jesus. As Jesus stood in the Jordan River at His baptism the Spirit was seen descending upon Him in the form of a dove. Luke then tells us, "Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert." (Lk 4:1) Time and time again Luke reminds us that Jesus is filled with and being led by the Holy Spirit. One of the prevailing themes of Luke's Gospel is the fact that Jesus is on a Spirit led mission to the Cross and beyond. Jesus commends His Spirit into His Father's hands as He dies upon the Cross only to be raised up by that same Spirit on Easter Sunday.

As He enters the Upper Room that first Easter Sunday, the first thing that the Risen Lord does is breathe the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is breathed into the Church. Now we the Church, the Body of Christ, are to be about the Spirit led mission of God here on earth. Like the people of our first reading, we could look at the mess of our world, the horrors of the pandemic, the political divisions among ourselves and between nations and despair... or we could rejoice discovering our role in God's plan. When we do that we find real meaning and purpose for our lives. The key is to allow the Holy Spirit into our hearts to become Spirit filled, Spirit led and Spirit giving people and so we pray, come Holy Spirit fill the heart of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

The age-old adage or question comes to mind today, i.e., If a tree falls in the middle of the woods and there is no one there to hear it, does it still make a sound? If we recall our middle school science, sound is caused by a vibration that travels through the atmosphere. It is referred to as a soundwave. When the soundwave reaches an eardrum, it is received and transmitted to the brain and so we hear the sound caused by the vibration. In our example, as the tree falls its motion makes a soundwave as it passes through the atmosphere on its way down. As it makes contacts with its environment and eventually the ground it creates additional vibrations that produce soundwaves. The soundwaves travel through the atmosphere until they lose their energy. If there is no living organism to receive the soundwave, technically there is no sound, only a soundwave traveling at 32,000 feet per second.

There is something very profound about the Word of God. God spoke and everything came into being. God said, "Let there be light," and light came into being. Through Him all things came into being. There is a power in the Word of God to effect reality. When time was right the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us such that we might hear the Good News, that Jesus might change the reality of the effects of sin and death. As powerful as it is, the Word is love, and love requires freedom, and the Word of God is only fulfilled if we choose to hear it with our ears and with our minds and with our hearts.

My grandfather, who was my sponsor, gave me a beautiful leather-bound bible for my Confirmation. I made my Confirmation in the eight-grade. Many years later that bible was still on the bookshelf in excellent condition. It remained unopened for years. The only Word of God that I heard was at Mass on Sunday.

In my early thirties I was enticed to make a Cursillo Weekend Retreat. I brought my bible with me. On Saturday evening of that retreat, I had a profound conversion experience. I felt the embrace of God's love as never before. I literally felt the rush of the Holy Spirit come upon me. My heart was rent open before God. My heart was emptied of sin and God's love poured in. That evening, alone in my room, I opened my bible. Grandpa's signature with love was on the cover page. I opened to the Gospel of John and began to read. What happened was so profound that it was almost frightening. The Words seemed to jump off the page. It was God speaking directly to me. I was reading with my eyes and hearing with my ears, but somehow God was communicating directly to my heart.

Earlier that evening, during the deep conversion experience, I heard God telling me that I was to be a priest. What I actually heard was, "You are a priest." It would be a few years of procrastination and five years of seminary training, before I would realize my true identity. That evening, I was agonizing with my unworthiness, and asking myself, "why me?" Then I read the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you to go and bear fruit that will last." I knew that Jesus was speaking directly to me.

I still have the beautiful bible that grandpa gave me. It is now so tattered that both covers have been taped numerous times and pages are coming unbound. It will always be with me. God continues to speak directly to my heart from the words on those pages. It is my most cherished possession. Although I regret all those years that it sat dormant on the shelf, it is now fulfilling its purpose in my life, and for that I am eternally grateful. Every Word is fulfilled in my hearing.

F. Glenn