

### Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (C) – January 27, 2019

(Nehemiah 8:2-4a,5-6,8-10; Ps. 19:8,9,10,15; 1Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4;4:14-21;)

Our first reading today is from the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was not really one of the prophets of Israel. The Old Testament is the history of God's covenants with his people, beginning with Adam and Noah, Abraham and then Moses. They had been unfaithful many times and God had to get their attention in one way or another. There were consequences for disobeying and breaking that covenant, that relationship with God. For Adam and Eve it was being rejected from the Garden of Eden. For Noah's time it was the great flood which killed all but Noah's family. For Abraham it was leading him to a new land with the promise of many descendants and at one point sacrificing his long promised son. But Abraham was always faithful to God. He was rewarded with the life of his son. During the time of Moses there were many times the people were unfaithful. Through the intercession of Moses, who was faithful, God spared them many of those consequences.

Finally God had allowed the Babylonians to overtake the people of Israel. Everyone was not taken out – only the leaders, the priests of the temple, the educated and the craftsmen. When that time was fulfilled God allowed the Babylonians to be overtaken by the Persians, who allowed the Jews to return to Israel. By this time many of the Jews had businesses, homes and families in the foreign land and were not anxious to return. The Persian leader sent Nehemiah to be governor under him to Israel. Ezra was both a priest and a scribe, so he knew how read and write and interpret the Word - the Law of God to the uneducated people so they could understand.

If you can imagine a history buff who knew the ins and outs of our leaders from the time of the struggles in Europe to practice their faith freely and to be free of political domination, the Declaration of Independence by the new American Colonies, the Revolutionary War, the exploration of Lewis and Clark, the settling of the Midwest, the Civil War and all of the heroes that went along with that.

When such a teacher realized his students knew none of this how he would passionately try to share that history in a way they could understand and appreciate. It is their identity as Americans. Imagine a music teacher trying to instill her/his love for music to their student, knowing it is the love of music which opens and encourages one to learn how to sing and play a musical instrument.

Or imagine a grandmother/father who realize their grandchildren know none of the stories and experiences of their ancestors and their joy of the children listening intently to those stories. Then you can imagine the priest/scribe Ezra today – his deep desire for the people to know their ancestry, their relationship with God over the centuries, in fact their very self identity. Today he is carefully reading and explaining the Word - the Law of God to many of them for the first time. He speaks to all of the men, women and children who are old enough to understand. They are so affected by hearing all of this they are filled with tears.

In our gospel reading Luke explains his careful study of what he has learned about Jesus – that he is the promised Messiah and fulfills all of the prophecies for centuries. So through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Luke writes for his people and for us centuries later. His, is the only of the four gospels to give us the infancy narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus, their parents. His is the only gospel to show us the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary taking Jesus to Jerusalem each year, and to lose Jesus in the temple when they begin to return home. Today he shows Jesus after beginning his public work in Galilee and performing other miracles at Capernaum. He returns to his home of Nazareth.

Occasionally people ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” Today we see him going into the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom. Jesus also went to church each week and participated in proclaiming and hearing the word/law of God and offering worship to God. Today he stands up to read. They are anxious to hear him speak after all they have heard about their native son. He reads from the prophet Isaiah. Then after sitting down, as a teacher would do,

while they look intently at him, he tells them something they have never heard before, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

I don't think they could have grasped the importance and long lasting affect those words would have on their people and people of all ages and centuries since that time. In ages past we have depended on prophets to bring God's life saving word to us. Since the time of Jesus we have the Word of God in our midst, both in Word and Flesh. Because he is God the Son, the Word of God made flesh, no other prophet or priest can take his place or give us more than he can.

If you, like me, learn to live on that word, we, like Ezra the priest/scribe, also want to share that good news and that experience with all who do not know. We, like the history buff, the music teacher and the grandmother/father want our students and children to know and experience Jesus in order to know the one true God, who loves us and has given much that we might know, love and be with him.

Every word and action of Jesus in the bible is intended for our ultimate salvation with him. At the end of this life and at the end of time, as we know it, there will be only two options, Heaven or Hell. Hell is the rejection of the only one who can fill our deepest needs and desires – an eternity of misery. Heaven is knowing and experiencing God's love for eternity, which fulfills our every desire. That is why we, like Ezra, have a deep desire to share what we know to those who do not know or have not experienced our true identity as children of God, through Jesus Christ.

In our second reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians we hear that we are a part of the Body of Christ. Like a body there are different parts, such as the hand, the foot, the heart, the mind and every other organ. All are important to make the body whole and to be able to live life more fully. Like the body not all of us are mothers or fathers or priests or teachers or prophets. But we each have a share in the spiritual gifts. We each can share our faith by words and examples. There is someone whose eternity depends upon you. May God bless and inspire you to do so. May you listen and respond to him.