

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

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

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

GOD'S POWERFUL WORD

How powerful is God's word? Well, consider that God created the entire universe and everything that exists by simply uttering his word! The Word of God took on flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and dwelt among us. The word of God is a manifestation of the power and authority of God himself. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword..." (Heb. 4:12). Today's readings help us appreciate the power of God's word.

NEHEMIAH

Many Old Testament readings in past weeks have referred to the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews (598-538 BC). Today's first reading is from the Post-Exile period of reconstruction and rebuilding. Nehemiah was a layman who worked with the priest Ezra to restore government and religion during this time.

In the course of the rebuilding, Ezra read from the book of the law to the people. The powerful word of God brought about conviction of heart to the people, who were "weeping as they heard the word of the law."

Ezra and the Levites encouraged the people to rejoice and celebrate the word of God: "Do not be saddened this day for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength."

The conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and God's word does not lead to condemnation but rather to repentance, hope and joy!

GOSPEL

Our gospel today combines St. Luke's introduction to his gospel with Jesus' sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry. As a rationale for writing his gospel, Luke explains that he "decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence...so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received."

Jesus reads here from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." After reading the passage he says, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

This sermon produced some mixed results, as we will hear next Sunday. The word of God is indeed sharper than a two-edged sword and cuts both ways!

1 CORINTHIANS

Today's second reading is St. Paul's teaching on the Body of Christ. Using the example of the human body, Paul speaks about cooperation and interdependence among the members of Christ's Mystical Body.

All are members of the body; each member has some gift and something to contribute to the body. No one has all the gifts, so we need the gifts of each other, even as the human body depends on the functions of various members for its health and well-being. There is unity of purpose but diversity of function within the body.

DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF THE LORD

The Responsorial, Psalm 19, is a beautiful paean to God's law referring to it as perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, pure, true, and just! The Wisdom books in the Old Testament present the observance of the law of the Lord as the surest way to attain God's wisdom.

One of the scourges of our present time is a spirit of lawlessness that seems to have been set loose among us and upon us. The word of God today is a fitting antidote to the current wave of anarchy and nihilism.