

11 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C January 27, 2019
Nehemiah 8:1-4,5-6,8-10 Psalm 19 1Corinthians 12:12-30 Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals His mission statement when He goes to the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus is inviting the people to believe in a new way of living. Picture the men, young and old alike, standing in the inner court, and the women standing in the outer court, all listening intently to Jesus as He reads the words from the prophet Isaiah. After Jesus reads the words, He declares, "*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*"

For the Jewish people, it is a declaration that the moment of salvation has arrived and that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and dreams. The people have been waiting for over fifteen hundred years for the Messiah to come and now the waiting time is over.

The effect is stunning as the people try to come to terms with the fact that the Holy One of God has turned out to be one of their own. The hope of ages has been born in their midst. Jesus outlines His mission as bringing liberty, justice and freedom to a people held in spiritual bondage in so many ways. The people now know that God has not abandoned them.

We can be very much like the people in the synagogue listening to Jesus when He reads His mission statement. At each Sunday Mass we listen to Jesus proclaiming His message. The readings and homily are the place of the life-giving truth of what we can be in Christ, the place that unifies us as parts of the one Body of Christ and the place of mission, sending us to extend the reach of Christ to people around us.

How well are we listening to the Readings? Each Sunday the Readings can pierce our hearts in three ways. We can listen with our minds, which can give us information. We can listen with our hearts, which can inspire us. We can listen with our souls, which can transform us.

First, to listen to the Word of God with our mind, we receive God's Word in our intellect; we contemplate it, we ponder it, we allow it to stir up images in our minds. One person who mastered listening to the Word of God with his mind was Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuit order of priests. He would read a passage of Scripture,

place himself in that Scripture through the eyes of the various characters to feel their thoughts, and experience everything that they experienced.

With today's Gospel Reading, perhaps St. Ignatius would have imagined himself as a person in the assembly watching Jesus unroll the scroll, and feel surprise, excitement, and joy when Jesus announces that the Scripture has been fulfilled in his hearing. By listening to the Word of God with his mind, Ignatius came to know Jesus in a deeply personal way. Listening to God's Word with our minds brings us information.

Secondly, to listen to the Word of God with our hearts brings us inspiration. We allow God's Word to enter our lives, to touch the very core of our being. The Word stirs our emotions and it touches our own situations. We hear the Word of God stirring the people's hearts in today's First Reading. Ezra opens the scroll of the Word of God in the presence of the nation of Israel, and all the people, weeping for joy, prostrate themselves before God. They listen to Ezra read and interpret the Word. They listen to it, absorb it, and allow it to inspire and change their lives.

Finally, listening intently to God's word with our soul brings us transformation. After having listened to the Word of God with your mind and let it inspire the depths of your heart, then listen with your soul. When you listen to God's Word with your soul, feel yourself being transformed by the Words of Scripture you have been hearing. You can enter into conversation with God. You ask: "Lord, what do I need to do to make my life reflect your Word?" Thus, you listen to the Word of God for information, which becomes inspiration, which then transforms your life.

The Words of Scripture reveal God the Father's love and the way we are to live. Having so moving a demonstration of God's care and love for us can fill us with confidence and move us to rejoice and be filled with joy. It also shows us that our celebration of the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Holy Eucharist is not just a memorial that recalls historical facts. It is our participation in the very mystery of our redemption, an opportunity for us to be spiritually nourished with the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. What could be a greater privilege for us than to be *completely united to Christ* and filled with His Divine life?

The readings each week remind us, encourage us, and hopefully move us to embrace the mission that is ours. Let the Word of God pierce your heart, enlighten your

mind, and fill your soul with His Divine presence. Humble yourself and invite Jesus into your mind, heart and soul today.

We ask God to let our lives reflect His Word, and we listen to His voice as it guides us on our pilgrim journey home to Him. Let us allow Christ's vision in our Gospel reading today to pierce our hearts so that we can become living missionaries to Jesus' glory and power.