

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Nehemiah 8.2-6, 8-10)

Ezra Reads from the Law

The Book of Nehemiah, from which today's reading is taken, is the latest historical book of the Hebrew Bible. It describes the re-establishment of the People of Israel, now the Jews, in and around Jerusalem, on their release from exile in Babylon. In the 70 years of exile they had developed a way of life based on the law and marked by Sabbath, circumcision and ritual food, which distinguished them not only from the Babylonians, but also from those inhabitants of Judaea who had not been dragged into captivity.

It was only those who were passionate for the Lord and this way of life who returned to the ruins of Jerusalem. Others stayed in more comfortable exile. Ezra, the expert in the Law, and Nehemiah, commissioned by the King of Persia (in whose empire Judaea lay), were at different times leaders of the community. In this scene, Ezra reads out and so promulgates the Law in Jerusalem, to the acclaim of the people.

What a contrast to the scene in the synagogue at Nazareth where Jesus reads out the passage from Isaiah that is the clue to his way of life and that of his followers, only to be rejected by his own people!

Question:

How would you explain to a non-believer that God's Law is a joy and a treasure?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 12.12-30)

The Body of Christ

Following directly on last Sunday's reading, in today's passage Paul shows just why the different gifts of the Spirit must be used for the common purpose of building up the community. He compares the community which lives with Christ's life, the life of the Spirit, with a human body. For the effective functioning of the human body each highly diverse organ must play its part, contribute its own particular speciality.

To prevent the individual Corinthians becoming proud and possessive of their own particular gifts, he stresses that, like parts of the body, none is more important than any other. Is it less serious if your liver fails than if it's your kidneys?

This comparison of a community to a human body is common in ancient literature, but nowhere else is the community as a body described as the body of a particular person in the way that Paul designates the Corinthian Christian community as the Body of Christ. The Body which lives by the life principle of Christ's Spirit is Christ's own Body.

Question:

What makes the Body of Christ different from any other body?

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Gospel:

(Luke 1.1-4; 4.14-21)

Jesus Proclaims his Message

Today's gospel passage starts the series of readings from Luke that will continue throughout the ordinary Sundays of the Year. It is composed of two separate passages: first, it gives Luke's introduction to his gospel, in which he explains how and why he wrote it. Then, jumping over the preparatory stories of Jesus' infancy, baptism and testing in the desert, it comes directly to his programmatic manifesto in the synagogue at Nazareth.

The gospel is offered to Theophilus - a Greek name - and is written for gentile communities. So Luke stresses that Jesus' message is not just for Jews but for the peoples of the whole world. Twice in this short passage, which gives Jesus' programme, Luke stresses that Jesus is moved by the Spirit of the Lord.

As we saw in the second reading, the Spirit was palpably at work in the early Christian communities. This was no more than a continuation of the Spirit's activity from the very beginning of the Christian movement. In Luke's stories of the annunciation, birth and infancy of Jesus, the presence of the Spirit is constantly noted. In the earliest stories of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles, the same guidance directs every move.

Question:

Is the Spirit given enough prominence in the Church today??
