



The Word that Empowers

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10)

²On the first day of the seventh month, therefore, Ezra the priest brought the **law** before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. ³In the square in front of the Water Gate, Ezra 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**. ⁴Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion ⁵Ezra opened the **scroll** so that all the people might see it, for he was standing higher than any of the people. When he opened it, all the people stood. ⁶Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, “Amen, amen!” Then they knelt down and bowed before the LORD, their faces to the ground. ⁸Ezra read clearly from the **book of the law of God**, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. ⁹Then Nehemiah, that is, the governor, 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 lament, do not weep!”—for all the people were weeping as they heard the **words of the law**.

¹⁰He continued: “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 is your strength!”

THE FOCUS: **Reading of the Book in the Community**

COMMENTARY

- Nehemiah was the governor of Judah who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and instituted necessary reforms after they had come back from their exile in Babylon. The works of Ezra and Nehemiah were complementary in restoring the chosen people to God.
- Ezra, the priest who is also a temple scribe is the one who presides the assembly. He reads the Torah aloud.
- The assembly shows great respect for the word: the kneel down, bow before the Lord, their faces to the ground (v. 7).
- Then Ezra interprets the meaning of the Law for the people so that all could understand what was read (v.8) and they weep when they heard the Book of Torah (v.9). The blessings brought by the reading: eating and drinking rich foods and drinks (celebrating) and allotting food to those who have none (sharing) which amounts to joy and strength in the Lord.

REFLECTIONS

The Reading of the Torah in the assembly gathers, nourishes, strengthens and animates the community with joy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15)
**YOUR WORDS, LORD,
ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.**

SECOND READING (1 Cor 12:12-14, 27)

¹²* 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. ¹³For 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.

COMMENTARY

- Paul teaches about unity because of the question on spiritual gifts. Some believers misunderstand that speaking in tongues and ecstatic activity is superior above other gifts. (earlier verses 1-11 explain this)
- The metaphor of the body is used by Paul. There are many parts but function as one.
- Thus we have different gifts, different charism, different works. But because they come from God and inspired by the same Spirit, we have to feel as one for each must work for the common good, for the building up of the community.

REFLECTIONS

When we are together, our voice to proclaim the Word is louder and more efficacious.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21)

¹* Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled

among us, ²just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, ³I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread* throughout the whole region. ¹⁵He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. ¹⁶He 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 ¹⁷and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: ¹⁸“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,/ ¹⁹and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

²⁰Rolling 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. ²¹He said to them, **“Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

THE FOCUS: The Fulfillment of the Scriptures

COMMENTARY:

- The Holy Spirit inspires Luke to write the account about Jesus in an orderly sequence. Theophilus means lover of God, the beloved of God—vice versa! (Theo means God and philein means to love)!
- Located in the beginning of the gospel, this pericope tells about the inaugural address of Jesus, the way Presidents do declare during our days the thrust of their government. Jesus’ ministry is Spirit-driven (v. 14).
- As he reads from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus also identifies the prophetic works he does in his ministry (vv. 18ff): to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery

of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

- The root word of Isaiah also means to save.

- A year acceptable to the Lord brings the image of the Jubilee year they celebrate every 50th, when debts are forgiven. A time therefore when God has chosen to show favour to his people.

- And Jesus as a prophet, affirms the fulfillment of these things after he has proclaimed it.

REFLECTIONS

The text which reveals Jesus' program of saving acts paints for us a very compassionate God. The God who truly cares for all peoples but much more for the marginalized, the captives and the oppressed.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The proclamation of the Word restores the strained relationship of God with His people (First Reading). Thus we have to gather together in the Lord. And the effects of this is that we become more productive and conscious of our role in the community for we become aware that our gifts are to build up our community (Second Reading). We have to make this Word of God take root in our lives, and so inspired by the Spirit of God, we lead others back to the culture of life through proclaiming the glad tidings, the Word of God- total human liberation (Gospel).

How to develop your homily/reflections

Today is National Bible Sunday. Narrate the story of a person or a saint who is struck by the Word of God and so is propelled to go to a missionary work (e.g. Saint Augustine, Bartolomeo de Las Casas, Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Stress the power of the Word *cf* 2 Tim 3:16-17—(All scripture is inspired by God and is use-

ful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.)

Encourage the faithful to form bible study groups.

When people form groups to study and pray the Bible, we are assured that God continues to reveal His saving mystery in the midst of them. The group may grow into other circles of discernment so that people grow in the wisdom of the Word of God as Ezra and Nehemiah, Paul and Jesus have shown us.

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Today is National Bible Sunday.
2. Why is Saint Jerome considered the Patron Saint of Bible scholars and students and all lovers of the Word of God?
3. Recall an experience in the past when you were made courageous by the Word of God. How did it happen?

BIBLE TRIVIA

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter of the Bible; while Psalm 119 is the longest. Psalm 118 is in the center of the Bible. There are 594 chapters before Psalm 118 and 594 chapters after that. 594 plus 594 equals 1,188 and what's at the center of the Bible? Psalm 118:8: "It's better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man."

Perfect message to all of us!

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