

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
23rd January 2022 - Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Nehemiah 8:2-6. 8-10. Psalm: 18. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. 27. Gospel: Luke 1:1-4. 4:14-2.

When Scott Hahn, then a Presbyterian minister, who was expected to preach for at least 45 minutes each Sunday, and who had been brought up to understand that anything Roman Catholic was wrong, sat at the back of a Catholic church, he found himself amazed just listening to the Mass and how much of Sacred Scripture he was hearing. It shook him. Almost every word from the entrance antiphon to the dismissal was from or based on Scripture. That was his first step on coming, as he says in one of his many books 'Rome, sweet home'. Now he is one of the great apologists for Catholicism.

All Christians, and Jews and Muslims are people of a book.

For us it is the Bible, the Scriptures. For Catholics whenever we gather for a sacrament or worship, a large part is the Liturgy of the Word; Scripture. On Christmas morning at the Day Mass we hear those words from St John, very familiar to us "The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."

The Churches task is to make this known to all and sundry, that there *is* a God in heaven, and that this God *cares* about the world and its people He has made, and sent His Son, the Word to redeem us

Today's readings make the connection with the written word of God. In the 1st reading Nehemiah opens the word of God for the people. It had recently been re-discovered, after laying in abeyance through years of neglect and decadence during the Exile. Exile is over.

Note the exact details of what is recorded in Nehemiah:

- * The People *receive* the Word of God.
- * They *stand* when the Book is opened.
- * They *prepare* to listen, by honouring God with an Amen.
- * They receive the explanation and interpretation from the Priest.
- * They *celebrate* the Word with a party, to include the less fortunate.

The Psalm, this part of which celebrates the Law of the Lord as a rule for Life, giving Wisdom, Gladness, Light, Holiness, Truth, Rescue.

The 4 verses are dedicated to the Law of the Lord, the Rule of the Lord, The Precepts of the Lord, the Command of the Lord, the Decrees of the Lord: clearly a reference to the written, codified word of God.

This psalm is a forceful reminder that the written word is not really a code of practice, but an agreed way of life - a covenant, in fact. Hence the response, "Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life!"

The Gospel links the very first verses of Luke's Gospel, with the Nazareth episode in the synagogue, so as to stress the same lesson as the Nehemiah reading, that is: the Word of God has been delivered to God's People. **Jesus is that Word.**

Notice how both Ezra and Nehemiah *open the Book* for the People. The Word of God is offered to the People in the Holy Scriptures. Are they for studying or for celebrating?

Thank God, in the Church we do not compromise at all: yes, we reflect, we study, we analyse the Word of God. But above all we *proclaim* it, we *sing* it, we *repeat* it!

Note what Nehemiah's people do to the Word of God. They *prepare* properly to receive it. They *listen* to it. They *celebrate* it.

This use of the Scriptures is celebrated in the Emmaus story from the end of Luke's Gospel, where Jesus explains the Scriptures to the disciples, who respond, "were not our hearts burning within us while he explained the scriptures to us?" (Lk. 14:32).

We listen to the scriptures, to the Word of God, which is after all, God's part of the 'conversation', and our prayer becomes the Prayer of Listening when we celebrate and show hospitality to the Scriptures.

- the Word is among you, the Word is *in* you!
- the Word-made-Flesh, Jesus, is among you, He is *in* you!
- the Holy Spirit is among you, the Spirit is *in* you!

The Manifesto of Christ in the gospel, are coupled with the reading from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth. The announcement in Nazareth is "Good News to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden, and a Year of Favour from God for all". It sets the scene for the year, describing the mission of Christ in detail. Our mission too.

Canon Philip Dyson

LISTEN to Gospel and longer homily recording at Sunday 11am Mass via our homilies page
www.penzancecatholicchurch.org/homilies/2022.htm

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