

Sunday, January 27, 2019

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Responsorial: Psalm 19:8-10, 15
Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Experiencing Spiritual Renewal through Our Faith in Christ

He has anointed me. (Luke 4:18)

Often, when we read Scripture we see an immediate meaning and a long-term meaning. Take today's Gospel, where Jesus proclaims that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him to bring good news. In the immediate sense, we know that Jesus really was anointed by the Holy Spirit when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. But in the long-term sense, Jesus wants us to know that the same Spirit has anointed us as well.

When Jesus gave us the Great Commandment—to love God and to love one another—he was telling us to follow his example. He was telling us to go and set people free. He was urging us to hear and respond to the cry of the poor. He was asking us to be as concerned with people who are in need as we are with our relationship with him.

Ever since that time, Christians have held a special place in their hearts for the poor, the marginalized, the sick, prisoners, and the unborn. Shelters for the homeless, soup kitchens, prison ministries, and the protection for those who cannot protect themselves are woven into the heart of the Church's mission.

There are so many Christian organizations working to erase poverty, to improve education, to raise living standards, and to bring medical help to those who need it. But the cry of the poor still calls out to us. There are still homeless people living in tents and under bridges. There are still entire populations suffering from famine. There are still countless people dying from treatable diseases. And Jesus is still urging us to do whatever we can to help them.

The challenge can seem overwhelming. Nonetheless, if each one of us could add an hour or two every month to answer the Lord's call, that would mean an increase of thousands of hours. Imagine the joy it would give Jesus to see all his people taking their spiritual anointing seriously and laboring to set people free!

"Here I am, Lord. You have anointed me, and I want to serve."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. In the first reading, we hear how the word of God, the Scriptures, so touched the hearts and moved all the people who *listened attentively*. The reading ends with these words: *Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, 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 be sad, and do not weep"—for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: "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 must be your strength!"*
 - Why do you think the people were saddened, and wept, when they first heard the Scriptures read?
 - Why do you think Ezra the priest told the people to rejoice in the Lord, rather than weep?
 - Why should *rejoicing in the LORD* be our response when the Word of God is read at Mass, or when we read it on our own? Is that your response? Why or why not?
2. The responsorial psalm also speaks of the effect the word of God has on those who hear it: *The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul; The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; The ordinances of the LORD are true, all of them just.*
 - The Responsorial Psalm tells us that the word of God affects us by *refreshing the soul, giving wisdom to the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eye*. Why is this so?
 - How often during the week do you turn to the Scriptures for refreshment, wisdom, joy, and enlightenment? What are some ways that God has touched you through your reading of Scriptures?
 - How important is it to read and meditate on the Scriptures every day, for example, the daily Mass readings? If you don't already do it, are you willing to commit to a daily time of Scripture reading? Why or why not?
3. The second reading opens with these words of St. Paul: *Brothers and sisters: 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. He reminds us that Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. He continues with these words: But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.*
 - St. Paul says that *the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary*. Why is this true?
 - He also tells us that there should be *no division in the body*. What steps can you take to heal any divisions and bring more unity to your family, your parish, and your community?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus reads these words from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth: *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, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.* The reading ends with these words of Jesus: *Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*
 - In what ways has Jesus *fulfilled* the words of the prophet Isaiah to *bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free*?
 - How do these words also apply to us personally with regard to our families, the parish, and the community?
 - Saint John Paul II once said, "Sometimes even Catholics have lost or never had a chance to experience Christ personally; not Christ as a mere 'paradigm', but the Living Lord: 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6)." What specifically can you do to get to know the Jesus better, not "as a mere paradigm", but as your "Living Lord"?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the Gospel reading: *He has anointed me* (Luke 4:18). It includes these words: "Jesus wants us to know that the same Spirit has anointed us as well. When Jesus gave us the Great Commandment—to love God and to love one another—he was telling us to follow his example. He was telling us to go and set people free. He was urging us to hear and respond to the cry of the poor. He was asking us to be as concerned with people who are in need as we are with our relationship with him."
 - There are countless ways you can bring the good news to people who need his support, his love, and his comfort. What are some of the ways you have shared the good news with others?
 - What are some new ways you can respond to the "challenge" given at the end of the meditation?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his anointing upon your life. Ask him for the grace to respond to this by saying yes to his call to serve him. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Here I am, Lord. You have anointed me, and I want to serve."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]