

Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; Psalm 19:8-10, 15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, they were faced with the reconstruction and the restoration of their temple and city which were destroyed by their captors. Nehemiah was their governor and Ezra was their priest. While the structural reconstruction and restoration were going on, Ezra led the people to a spiritual restoration. Spiritual restoration was necessary because the Jews were exposed to the worship of other gods in Babylon which produced a generation that did not properly follow the Covenant between God and their ancestors. A major part of the renewal of the Covenant was the reading of the Book of the Law to the people. The assembly was made up of young and old. Ezra read the word of God to the assembly from morning to midday. When the people heard of the story of God's relationship with their ancestors, and how they, themselves, had violated the Covenant and disconnected themselves from God, they wept in sorrow and repentance.

In the same way, we, also, need to look back at our journey with God. An honest reflection will help us to see God's faithfulness, and our unfaithfulness, and our disconnection from him. At the beginning of a new year, a resolve to renew our Covenant with God, reconnect and have a closer relationship with him should be of primary importance.

Ezra read out the word of God from daybreak till midday "and all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law." How much time do we spend in reading the word of God, and how attentive are we to the word? Many people do not mind the time, the energy, and resources they spend on worldly activities while they are very apathetic to spiritual matters. Quality spiritual time means quality relationship with God! Jesus says, "For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you" (Luke 6:38). Nehemiah encouraged the people, "for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). We can, also, interpret Nehemiah's words to mean, "Quality time with the Lord must be your strength."

While the first reading invites us to renew our Covenant with God and reconnect with him, St. Paul in the second reading invites us to examine our relationship with our fellow human beings, see how far we are disconnected from one another, and reconnect with those we are disconnected from. We cannot reconnect with God while we are disconnected from one another. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:20-21).

St. Paul writes in the second reading, "*God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' ... 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*" (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). Dalai Lama (the Buddhist spiritual leader) says, "We must recognize that the suffering of one person or one nation is the suffering of humanity." Someone says, "When everybody is somebody, then no one is nobody." Everyone matters. Everyone is important.

In the gospel, Jesus declares his mission by reading from the scroll of prophet Isaiah. The gospel invites us to continue Jesus' mission to bring good tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, bring recovery to the blind, and set the oppressed free. Among us and around us are the poor who need assistance, people going through various types of afflictions who need support, and cases of injustice which need to be addressed. As we begin a new year, it would be good to include in our resolutions how to participate in Jesus' mission. Since charity begins at home, let us see the realization of Jesus' mission, first, in our immediate environment and, then, continue to the larger society.

May God grant us the grace of spiritual restoration. May we be able to create relationships whereby everybody is somebody and no one is nobody. May we become disciples of Jesus who continue his mission wherever we are. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP