

Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, they were faced with the reconstruction and the restoration of their temple and city that were destroyed by their captors. Nehemiah was their governor and Ezra was their priest. While the structural reconstruction and restoration was going on, Ezra led the people to a religious restoration. Religious 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.

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 have disconnected from one another, and reconnect with those we have disconnected from. We cannot reconnect with God while we are disconnected from each other. "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).

The second reading says, *"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. For 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. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,' it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,' it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, 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."*

Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (Buddhist spiritual leader) says, "We must recognize that the suffering of one person or one nation is the suffering of humanity." Division, disunity, tribalism, racism, discrimination, rejection, fighting, killing, segregation, and supremacy disconnect us further and further from one another and cause more and more suffering to many people and entire humanity.

St. Paul continues, *"Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"* Individuals, groups, societies, races, nations, countries are gifted differently for the benefit of everyone and all humanity. Unity, justice, acceptance, harmony, understanding, collaboration, sharing, cooperation and peaceful coexistence make God's gifts bear much fruit for the benefit of everyone and all humanity.

The Gospel calls us to continue Jesus' mission, that is to bring good tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, bring recovery to the blind, and set the oppressed free. Jesus' mission will not be possible if we are disconnected from God and if we are disconnected from one another. Jesus' mission will continue, successfully, if we breakdown all dividing barriers and fill up separating gullies; reconnect with God, and reconnect with one another. Then, we will be able to see the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed, able to reach to them, and able to minister to them.

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