

3rd Sunday per Annum - C
Nehemiah 8:2-4a; 5-6, 8-10;
I Corinthians 12:12-30;
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21
Little Flower - 1/27/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

In his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey recommends personal mission statements. At the synagogue at Nazareth, at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus, quoting the prophet Isaiah, defined his mission: “*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.*” He then applies this prophecy to himself: “*Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*”

It is interesting that when he quotes Isaiah 61:1, Jesus omits the phrase “*to heal the brokenhearted.*” At least one Scripture scholar suggests that Jesus omitted this phrase because this phrase captures the essence of who and what Jesus was and is: the healer of broken hearts. If sin is alienation, Jesus healing the broken hearted is Jesus reconciling God and us, us among ourselves, us with ourselves, and us with our world. However, another interpretation of the omission is that Jesus or St. Luke wanted to avoid spiritualizing Jesus’ mission. His mission was to the marginalized, to those on the peripheries: the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed.

Today many people see little need for church, or, if they see a need for church, they do not feel any personal obligation to participate actively in the life of the community or any obligation to attend Sunday Eucharist. What we often forget is that the Christianity of Jesus was and is a Christianity of community. Both the Old and New Testament covenants were made not with individuals but with the community. In the New Testament, Jesus formed a community of disciples and apostles. The *Acts of the Apostles* tells the story of the foundation of the first churches. Most of St. Paul’s letters were written not to individuals but to Church communities.

In today’s reading from his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body. We are the members or parts of Christ’s body. The Holy Spirit is the soul or life principle of Christ’s body, the Church. Paul makes two very important points about the body of Christ. First, each of us is critically important to the life and growth of the community although we have different gifts and different roles in the Church. In other words, we need the Church, but the Church needs each one of us.

If we think about the human body, we realize that all the parts and functions work together for the growth and development of the body. The Church as the Body of Christ functions in the same way. This is what St. Paul meant when he wrote in last Sunday’s second reading that all the gifts God has given us have been given to us for the common good, i.e., to build up the Church. The Church grows and develops by caring for its members and evangelizing the world.

Whenever anyone leaves the Church, stops participating actively in the life of the community or attending Sunday Liturgy, or is hurting in any way, the whole Church suffers in a couple of different ways. As a caring community, we feel their hurt and alienation with them. However, because each of them has a unique part to play in God’s plan, the Church cannot accomplish all that God is calling it to accomplish without them.

My brothers and sisters, in Nehemiah, the Israelites were gathered in a solemn liturgical assembly to hear the proclamation and interpretation of the law of the Lord. The law was the glue that held the community of Israel together. The Holy Spirit is the glue that holds the Christian community together. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are all baptized in one Spirit.