

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 - 1/23/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

In 2019, Pope Francis designated the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as the Sunday of the Word of God, a Sunday “devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God.” What Pope Francis is asking us to do today, Ezra and Nehemiah did in their time. All three elements of Pope Francis’ challenge are contained in the first reading.

Both Nehemiah and Ezra had led some of the Babylonian captives back to Jerusalem, which they found in ruins. In today’s reading, Ezra proclaims and interprets the law of the Lord to the gathered people. The language of the passage makes it clear that this was a liturgical celebration. For example, when Ezra blessed the Lord, all the people responded by raising their hands high and saying “Amen, Amen” before bowing down and prostrating themselves before the Lord. At the end of the passage, Nehemiah invites them to continue to celebrate. Second, Ezra disseminated the word of God to those who did not know it. Finally, it was a study of the word of God because *“Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.”*

At Sunday Mass, it is important that we listen as attentively to the readings as those who heard Ezra listened. We also have the opportunity to read and reflect on them prior to coming to Mass. We can grow in our knowledge of Scripture through Bible studies in groups or on our own through Formed. Finally, we are called to share or disseminate God’s word and share our faith with others.

The New Testament offers several images to describe the Church. The preeminent image of the Church as the body of Christ is found in today’s reading from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Christ is the head of the body. We are the members of Christ’s body. The Holy Spirit is the soul or life principle of Christ’s body, the Church.

He makes two very important points about the body of Christ. Each of us is critically important to the life and growth of the community although we have different gifts and, therefore, different roles in the Church or parish. In other words, we need the Church and parish, but the Church and parish needs each one of us. Whenever anyone leaves the Church or parish, stops participating actively in the life of the community or attending Sunday Liturgy, or is hurting in any way, the parish and, indeed, the whole Church suffers. The reality is that each of us has a unique role or part to play in God’s plan of salvation that no one else can play.

In this reading, Paul is also reminding us that we are called to unity within the Church. He points out that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free persons, are all united in the same body. In these times of division within the Church and society, we need to remember that we all share the same Holy Spirit, a Spirit of love and unity. Many years ago, then Bishop, now Cardinal, Raymond Burke told me that what concerned him was not that people disagreed with each other in the Church. What concerned him was the lack of charity in those disagreements. It seems to me that today there is a complete lack of charity in most disagreements both within the Church and within society.

My brothers and sisters, in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey recommends that everyone have a personal mission statement. In today’s Gospel, Jesus finds his mission statement in the prophet Isaiah: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor...”* Our challenge as Christians, as we develop our personal mission statement, is to make Jesus’ mission our own and incorporate it in our personal mission statement.