

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday (C)

24<sup>th</sup> January 2016

'A Year of Favour'

Neh 8: *Erza read ... All the people listened attentively to the book of the Law*

1Cor 12: parts of the one Body of Christ

Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21: *To proclaim the Lord's Year of Favour*

In the heart of the passage from Isaiah chosen by Our Lord to read at His home synagogue of Nazareth, there is the beautiful phrase “to proclaim the Lord’s Year of Favour.” Jesus is quoting one of the great prophecies of the Messiah, the one expected by the Jews to be sent by God to save them. And a part of that Messiah tradition was that of a jubilee year, a “year of favour,” or a “year of mercy.” It was always part of the Jewish ideal that there was to be reconciliation — restitution — a return of land to those who had been forced to sell; a return of property in a jubilee year ... one might say, “a coming back together of things as they should be.” One could sum up in no better way the intention of Jesus in His ministry amongst us than this: to bring things back to how they should be, man in right relation with His loving God and Creator. In that sense, Jesus’s whole ministry is a jubilee, a ‘year of favour’ for all humanity.

In this sense, we can see that jubilee years in the Church — “holy years” — are an ongoing expression of this attitude: a perennial reminder that the Lord’s ministry, our faith, is about reconciliation, again and again bringing man back to God; again and again allowing God to bring man back to Himself. This present jubilee ‘Holy Year of Mercy’ is a perfect expression of this: a deep and soul-searching reminder that ultimately it is God’s loving mercy that allows us to be saved and set free. We cannot do without mercy; we simply cannot live our faith without appealing, time and time again, to God’s mercy. This ‘Year of Mercy,’ therefore, that Pope Francis calls us to, is to make sure that we never think of God’s mercy as something we don’t need, or something that we’re not worthy of asking for. None of us is really ‘worthy’ of God’s mercy; but that doesn’t stop Him offering it. He gratuitously offers His mercy and forgiveness simply because that is what He wishes to do, out of incomparable love for us.

I think it helps us to locate the idea of this ‘Year of

Mercy' in the context of Jesus's ministry. Here, at the outset of His public life, back in Nazareth, he immediately states that He is proclaiming "the Lord's Year of Favour." The idea of a jubilee year, a 'year of mercy,' then, is not some innovation, but rooted in just what Jesus is here on earth for. He is here to proclaim to all mankind that we can have great trust in the forgiveness of God; that we should allow Him to transform our lives into better examples of Christian living; and that we must seek to exercise mercy, if we are to expect mercy to be shown to us. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown them,*" says Jesus. And St James reiterates, in his letter, "*There will be judgment without mercy for those who have not been merciful themselves, but the merciful need have no fear of judgment.*" Let's cling on to the Lord's offer of mercy, his favour towards us, as our one and only hope!

Accepting God's mercy is not an excuse for letting our lives be unchanged. In fact, the relief and gratitude that receiving God's mercy creates in us should be the cause of a change of heart. Think of all those moving

moments when Our Lord says to those He has forgiven, "Go in peace and sin no more." Accepting God's mercy, receiving His grace, should give us the very incentive to love Him more, and keep more fervently His commandments. If we're thinking properly about this, if we're truly focussed on what this means, we will be bowled over by the Lord's tenderness and invitation to trust, be healed, and begin again. Let's not let the 'Year of Mercy' pass us by; let's be committed to keeping this 'mercy of God' before our mind's eye every day, and to re-train ourselves into acts and attitudes of mercy. Let me remind you of the prayer that our diocese has given us for the Year of Mercy:

*FATHER, slow to anger ...*