

3rd Sunday (C)

27th January 2019

'Even in your hearing'

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*

As I reminded you back in Advent when I gave my 4-week cycle of homilies on the Scripture and the Liturgy of the Word in the Mass, it is usual each Sunday to have connections between the 1st Reading (OT) and the Gospel Reading. In fact, whilst the Gospels typically follow a sequence, chapter to chapter, week by week, the OT readings do not. They jump around all over the place; and that's because they are chosen from any part of the Old Testament to shed light on the Gospel reading: to show how there are links between what God gave to Israel before, and as a preparation for, Christ and what in due course God gave in Christ Jesus, for the world.

So, today, quite clearly we get a strong link between the Book of the Law being read by Ezra the scribe as part of the rebuilding of the Temple and Jewish rituals after the Exile, and the reading from Isaiah in the Synagogue by Jesus Himself at Nazareth. Each marks a wonderful new beginning, a restoration and rebuilding by God of the faith of the people, expressed through the proclamation of the

Word. And, see in both instances what a profound effect that reading of the Scripture had on the congregation! As Ezra read, the tears poured down the cheeks of the people, moved as they were by their being able to come again into Jerusalem, its walls rebuilt, and to feel once again a people dedicated to the Lord. As they hear the words of the divine Law, it's as if they are hearing it for the first time, sensing its beauty and God's care for them, and they shed tears of joy. In Jesus's case, even more profoundly, He is announcing the coming of the Messiah, Himself, in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me ...". "And all eyes in the Synagogue were fixed on Him" — they were transfixed by the message that they were hearing. God was finally breaking in to their history as He said He would, in the person of the One long promised to Israel. Could this be true? They became very attentive, their whole focus on Jesus who was speaking and announcing this marvellous new beginning: "this text is being fulfilled, even in *your* hearing!"

Perhaps the first lesson of these readings, then, is to

listen to the readings! When we gather at Mass we don't just sit together quietly and read the readings to ourselves! We have them proclaimed publicly; we listen to them as a congregation, a people gathered in community united by these words. They are words that proclaim a joyful and eternal truth, for us, God's holy people: that He has performed these marvellous works for us, and for our salvation. We too, then, should be united and moved by the words of Scripture, whenever they are proclaimed at Mass, which requires of us an attentiveness, a focus, a *reverence* that respects the Word of God for being the *Word of God*.

We believe that the Scripture is inspired by God: that is to say, that the biblical authors, whilst using their human skills as writers and orators, committed to the sacred page that which God wished to convey. One would say, then, that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to commit to writing that which God wished to convey to the generations to come a record of His love and mercy, His plan and His actions on behalf of mankind. So, just as Our Blessed Lord was filled with the Spirit as He spoke at Nazareth, and won

the approval of all, so we need to be alert and alive in the Spirit if we are really to hear the power of the Gospel message. The Scripture was written under the influence of the Holy Spirit, so it needs to be read in the light of that same Holy Spirit. We must be alert to that fact, or else the Scriptural readings may simply pass us by, and not provide that meaningful response in the heart that they should do.

Finally, hearing God's Word should lead us to ever greater thanksgiving. God is not inactive or inattentive to our needs. He is constantly giving us existence and life, by His creative will. The Word of Scripture reminds us that He acts to build up again, rebuild and restore, time and time again. However poorly we act, however much we destroy and forget to co-operate with Him, and turn away, yet He is there, speaking to us, reminding us of all that He has done for us. Let's see Our Lord Jesus truly here in the sanctuary this morning, all our eyes are fixed on Him, the One God sent to restore us. At this Mass and at every Mass Jesus *is present*, saying: *this is My Body; this is My Blood poured out for you; this text is being fulfilled even in your hearing!*