

3rd SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR C HOMILY 2022

PROMISE AND FULFILMENT IN JESUS

Lk 1.1-4, 4.13-21 Neh 8.2-10 1Cor 12.12-30

Every time Nehemiah pops up with that reading of the Law, I am amused by the thought that the people are so moved by the contents that they end up in tears, but then again, when you really think about it, the reading went from early morning till noon, so one could imagine they were more bored to tears than attentive, wondering with patience or frustration or both, when it would end, than excited to hear the proclamation. Well, at least Ezra brightens them up with encouragement to go and enjoy good food and wine after the ordeal. It does fit well, as it coincidentally follows the wedding feast at Cana Gospel from last week. Whilst law itself has its place in civil society and in Church life, being a canon lawyer myself, I find it difficult to get too excited about the intricacies and details of the 1752 canons of the 1983 code of Canon Law!! The spirit and purpose of law needs to be to the fore, rather than the black letter approach, from my point of view.

And now, after the wedding feast in John's Gospel, we begin Luke's year with his introduction to his Gospel, the most orderly and historical narrative of them all, written in erudite Greek. From his introduction, where it is clear he is writing with a view to engender faith in Jesus in his readers and hearers, we jump to Jesus beginning his public ministry after the temptations and his time in the desert, to which we return in Lent. As Brendan Byrne SJ puts it: *"Luke's Gospel gives believers of non-Jewish background a firm identity... (which) is for all generations, right down to ourselves."*

The themes of promise and fulfilment are to the fore, as Luke makes his connections with Old Testament and then the time and person of Jesus, then continuity into the time of the Church with Acts of the Apostles. And here we are now, listening to Jesus' proclamation of his mission of revelation and teaching, starting in the synagogue at Nazareth, but where he is soon to be rejected, despite the power and authenticity of his words, the prophet to be rejected in his own country, among his own family and acquaintances.

Significant too is the way in which Jesus uses a prophetic style, in contrast to Nehemiah, focussed on the law, whatever the details. Jesus' reference is to Isaiah, then looking around him at the needs of those left out. His words are for the poor, the blind, metaphorically, as well as literally, the neglected, the excluded, the locked up, whether literally or figuratively, by their own limitations. He looks with hope to better times, as a result of responding to human need, oppression and suffering. In all of his ministry, Jesus never lays down the law, so to speak, but, guided by God's Spirit, rather emphasizes principles and attitudes for the Christian way of life of disciples, starting here with Isaiah and moving to the Beatitudes, as the heart of his teaching. Preaching the law of love is his primary aim, as he teaches by word and follows through in deed, indeed! This is God's plan for the salvation of flawed humanity, and it connects with the physical, economic and social needs of all, in seeking a more just and fair society. Implicit, too, is the reality of God's forgiveness, also revealed in the person of Jesus.

In our society and broader world today, we don't have to look far to see that these needs are enduring, and that there is still much needed to make our common humanity more understood, with barriers to be broken down than walls put up or maintained. Even here, one thing highlighted by the recent high profile anti-vaxxer deportation, which occupied a ridiculous amount of media time and space, was to remind us of the ongoing plight of many asylum seekers who have been in detention for many years now, and who, even if in community detention, are not legally permitted to work to support themselves and their families.

Just this week, I was talking with Kazem, an Iranian from Tehran, he and his wife and 2 children (Masiha at least doing well here in Grade 4 at St Therese's), still in limbo, with community detention ongoing over a number of years, and no sign of it ending, so that he could work to support his family as he wishes to do. It is so distressing and depressing to see such injustice, in what we would like to think is the land of the fair go!

And I can't let the opportunity pass to pay tribute to one of our most faithful long-term parishioners, Bryan Guiney, dying at 87, and whose funeral was here at St Therese's this week. Over many decades, he has quietly, but most effectively provided generous time and much energy into maintaining the parish surrounds, particularly with his attention to the rose garden, general maintenance of the memorial garden and parish facilities, including my residence, inside and outside, from rose bushes to pansies to tomato plants, all with

horse manure delivered and spread. (*Once he even had a trailer of it outside the church when a hearse turned up!*) I began his farewell with the question: “*What are we going to do now, without him?*” He was always there to respond to the needs of the parish and of those in difficulty, particularly through his involvement in service, with the parish St Vincent de Paul group of friends. We offer our sympathy to his family and friends, and deeply feel the loss ourselves as well, of a determined man, dedicated to living his faith in action all the way.

And so we continue our journeys of life in faith, guided by the Spirit, and with the concrete example of the person of Jesus to encourage and enthuse us. As Claude Mostowik MSC says: “*To show us what it looks like to love what God loves, and to see ourselves as God sees us, we understand there is no longer a **them**. Only an **us**. This constitutes a recovery of sight to us who are blind... It communicates liberation, hope and compassion for people made poor and marginalized by neglect... Jesus reads a very short and disturbing teaching from Isaiah... a clear message of liberation and nurturing love for all creation, with a special focus on the poor, the deprived and the oppressed.*” What can we do in response?

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