

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
January 27, 2019  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

When people are getting married, they set up a registry of gifts that they would like to receive. Mostly stuff for the kitchen. Pots and pans to replace hand-me-downs; cutlery and dishes that match a pattern. My cousin told me that the only stuff they have left from their wedding are religious. The dishes broke, other items became dated or worn out, better things came along. They still have their bible and their crucifix. It's hard not to make a little joke: our Bibles don't wear out because we never touch them. But maybe we treasure them. One family's tradition is to put funeral cards within its pages. It's a kind of prayer: trust in salvation, hope for heaven, love remembered with expectation.

Today's readings give us responses to the word of God that is found in Scripture. Ezra "brought the Law before the assembly," to the people in Jerusalem. The rich had returned from captivity in Babylon. Others were descended from the humble remnant left behind. The men and women gathered together in the square. They "were attentive to the book of the Law." They tried to understand. They stood up when Ezra opened the book, and assented to its truth: "Amen, Amen." They lifted their hands and bowed their heads. They worshipped the Lord and wept at their transgressions, until they were told, "do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10  
Ps 19  
1 Cor 12:12-30  
Lk 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Our experience mirrors that day in Jerusalem; like them, we respond to the word of God. This homily tries to give the sense of the readings so that you can understand, just as the Levites tried to do centuries ago. It's part of the liturgy of the Word, heard both by people who had left the Church for years, and by those who never left, now united into one body by faith. Men and women, old and young, trying to pay attention, trying to understand. We stand for the Gospel, lift our hands at the sign of the cross, and bow our heads at the name of "Jesus." Like them, we worship the Lord: "Thanks be to God. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life. Thanks be to God. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

All these are exterior actions, dictated by the rite according to the Roman Missal. These actions prepare us for something internal. Understanding and assent by our reason. Contrition and consolation within our soul. And something even deeper: conversion of our heart, moving our will to love. It's made possible by Jesus. He fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." He changes us at our very core, freeing us from the ties that bind, healing us for the ties which join. He taught us the law of love, died so that we could receive it, and lives again allowing us to practice it.

Freed from fear, changed from servant to friend, we can love not just by ritual, but with spontaneity; in our own ways, by our own means; a diversity made one in Christ.

After Jesus spoke in Nazareth, "he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him." A choice hung in the air, electric and tense. And Jesus decided. He chose a response. "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The anointed one reached forward with a key. The scroll had words, written and mute. But Jesus is the eternal Word, the spirit of life. For this Eucharist, let us respond to the Word with faith and hope and love.