

JANUARY 24, 2016

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 [NEH 8:2-4A, 5-6, 8-10](#)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM [PS 19:8, 9, 10, 15](#)

R. (cf John 6:63c) **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

READING 2 [1 COR 12:12-30](#)

GOSPEL [LK 1:1-4; 4:14-21](#)

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events

that have been fulfilled among us,

just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning

and ministers of the word have handed them down to us,

I too have decided,

after investigating everything accurately anew,

to write it down in an orderly sequence for you,

most excellent Theophilus,

so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings

you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,

and news of him spread throughout the whole region.

He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up,

and went according to his custom

into the synagogue on the sabbath day.

He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring glad tidings to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down,

and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.

He said to them,

“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

HOMILY

In 2002, I saw a copy of a book in a book store called: *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* by John Culver and John Hyde. Not being from Iowa, I was not familiar with our only Iowan that has become Vice President, serving under president Franklin Roosevelt. I was immediately fascinated with such a notable person from our state about whose story I knew very little. Imagine my surprise, then, when reading his story, it became such a profoundly riveting read, for in it I discovered my own personal story. For, although I am not originally from Iowa, there is one person who connected this Michigander to Iowa—a most famous Iowan indeed: Henry Wallace himself, who died when I was not yet two. For better or worse, you can thank Henry Wallace that I am here today. If the homily gets too long, blame him!

Just how did I read about my story in that of Henry Wallace? Wallace was born in Adair County, Iowa in October 1888 and attended the great Iowa State College in Ames, where he met George Washington Carver. After graduating in 1910, he worked on the editorial staff of his family-owned paper, *Wallace's Farmer*. However, it was his revolutionary work with corn hybrids by which he made a name for himself, and the immediate name was either “crock” or “cuckoo.” After all, why would anyone BUY seed corn when you had a whole field of it? Yet, with a few thousand dollars left to his wife as an inheritance, Wallace founded Hi-Bred Corn Company, which later became Pioneer Hi-Bred. It was Wallace's vision that, by the careful study of

hybrid corn, he would increase yield, resistance to diseases, and produce plants that could respond in different climatological situations. This was the vision that got him declared “cuckoo.”

How could he make the case that his special corn was better than that growing in the fields all over the state? He had to devise scientific techniques to prove that his corn was significantly better and worth paying for! To this end, he was a pioneer, together with the bright folks at Iowa State, in developing everyone’s favorite field of mathematics: Statistics. Even today, agricultural terminology is evident in the field of statistical analysis, which speaks of “experiments” and, “treatments.” So, because of Wallace’s innovations, it was in Ames IA where landmark developments in the field of statistical analysis were devised.

Meanwhile, 60 years after Wallace’s work on corn hybrids began, a former engineer from General Motors was searching for a school to continue his studies in the field of statistical analysis. After scouring the country, and with a near miss in Iowa City, he chose to attend that landmark center of statistical analysis, the Iowa State University. So, in this, Henry Wallace’s story merged with mine, so that, in a very real sense, his story explains, at least partly, why I stand here today. Depending upon your opinion, you can either thank him or blame him.

The more we can know about how we got where we are, the more we can understand who we are and then be faithful to our truest selves, to who we are to be.

Imagine, then, if you will, that, when hearing the question, “how did you get here,” here didn’t mean Waterloo IA, but rather “here” meant literally here, around this altar, praying with you. Just like, if you wanted to know how I got here in Iowa (though I’m not sure you did!), I had to tell you the story of Henry Wallace, so, to understand how we have come to gather around this altar, we need some stories from history—we need to hear about the actions of God in history—the holy Scriptures—how we got here. When we hear about them, we are reminded of who God is and who we are, God’s chosen people, claimed and saved through God becoming present, through the voices of the prophets and, finally, through God’s very being present in Jesus of Nazareth. No surprise, therefore, that at each Mass we listen to the more remote history of our faith, the prophets and other writings of the Old Testament, and then hear of our family of faith’s specific beginning through the teachings and actions of Jesus, preserved in the gospels.

St. Luke, from whom we hear today from the very beginning of his gospel, speaks to this need we have to hear our story to be who we are called to be when he says, “Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received. [Luke then begins . . .] Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region.” Luke tells us the story of Jesus, with accuracy guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, so that we can know who Jesus is, so we can know who we are and why we have come here.

So, what brought you here today? The answer we must give is to that we must tell our story—for the long story of God’s people ends at this altar. For God’s long history of seeking his people reaches its end at this altar, when we experience union, communion, with our God when God draws close to our hearts in the Eucharist we share.

The story of God’s people that we recall each time we gather here: It is our story, yours and mine, and it’s personal. What a riveting read it is!