

THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)

Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Our scripture passage for this Sunday comes from the Gospel of Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21. In this text we read of how Jesus returned to Galilee to start His public ministry by visiting the synagogue in Nazareth. As He did so, Jesus summarized His mission by reading from the Prophet Isaiah. The following are some points to note about this passage and how it applies to our lives as disciples.

Jesus begins by saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me:" The Hebrew word for "Anointed" is "Messiah" and the Greek word for "Anointed" is "Christ". Jesus is introducing Himself as the Messiah and Christ who brings the Spirit of the Lord into the world. In doing so, He is stating that mission is not of his own choosing but is given to Him by God the Father. This has implications for us as Christian disciples because in our baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and share in the "anointed" identity of Jesus (thus the name "Christian"). His mission is now our mission because we are members of his mystical body. Thus, we are not to simply read about Jesus carrying out His ministry in the Gospel; rather, what Jesus does is meant to guide us in how we should be acting. From the moment of our baptism our life is not our own; instead, it is Christ who lives in us.

- *How can you come to know more clearly your mission in Christ?*
- *How do you know when you are carrying out the will of God?*

Secondly, Jesus says that He is being sent, "To bring glad tidings to the poor:" The word for "glad tidings" or "good news" is also interpreted as "Gospel". His message will be good news for those who are "the poor" because He will proclaim God's rich and generous mercy. He will also show

in his actions and ministry that God has a preferential option for those who are powerless, poor, and suffering. The cultural world of Jesus' time believed that God rewarded the "good" and "favored" people with material riches. Thus, riches were a sign of God's favor and approval. Jesus changes the value system of His world to reflect a different set of values—the values of the Kingdom of God. In our poverty, we can know our need for God and welcome Jesus as our Savior. In order for the Gospel to be "good news" for us, therefore, we have to know our poverty. For example, the times when we can't do what we want for ourselves or for others, when we lack what it takes to make it on our own, or when we realize our need for God.

- *How does this passage help you to identify and articulate your own poverty?*
- *When do you most realize your need for God?*
- *When do you feel most limited or powerless in your ability to help others?*

Third, Jesus says that He will bring "Release to captives". The Greek word for "release" is actually the same as the word for "Forgiveness" (*apoluo*). In His ministry, Jesus will release so many people bound by sin, weakness, and destructive habits. He will set them free to become the people God intends them to be. However, He can only do that for those who know their need for freedom, own their sin, and seek His forgiveness. Sometimes people who are captive and paralyzed in sin cannot even imagine what their life could be like. Oftentimes, too, people lose hope and begin to believe that their sin is greater than God's mercy. When Jesus shares the gift of forgiveness with people, He not only gives them freedom to move on with their lives but He also gives them peace and healing so that they no longer define themselves by their failures or wounds.

- *Who do you know of who is "captive" in cycles of sin? How has the Sacrament of Reconciliation helped you experience the freedom, healing, and peace of forgiveness?*
- *When have you seen someone lose hope because of an experience of sin or failure in their lives?*

Fourth, Jesus says that He will bring "Sight to the blind." In the Gospels, people gain physical sight but they also gain spiritual insight to be able to see God present in their lives, other's lives, and the world around them. Their eyes will be opened to see God present in Jesus even on the cross. The ultimate sight Jesus gives us is the ability to see our lives as God sees us and to know God's love for us-something we don't always see in everyday experience but which is there nonetheless. We also begin to see others differently once we have that spiritual sight and, when we do, we love and care for our neighbor in need because we have come to recognize each of them as a brother and sister.

- *What has helped open your eyes to see the presence of God acting in your life?*
- *How have your eyes been opened to see others, even strangers, as brothers and sisters in Christ?*
- *What attitudes can cause us to become blind to God's presence or to seeing others as brothers and sisters?*

Fifth, Jesus says that He will let the "oppressed go free". Jesus freed those oppressed by unclean spirits; He healed those who were debilitated with physical injury and illnesses, and He even set free those who were condemned by others. In doing so, He helped people overcome their burdens and to move forward with their lives. He helped them to be better people, more capable people, and more grateful people. He helped them become people who could walk with Him in discipleship by removing those

things that hindered them. Many of the people Jesus encountered were oppressed by the social and cultural world of their time. That list included women, gentiles, lepers, criminals, and tax collectors. They were all people who were not allowed an equal place in Jesus' time but to whom our Lord will give a place among His flock.

- *Who experiences oppression in our society?*
- *How are people held back or prevented from developing their potential today?*
- *How can you help liberate someone you know who is oppressed?*

Jesus ends His reading of the Prophet Isaiah by stating simply "Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing". The emphasis in this passage is on the word "today:" He's saying that this passage is being fulfilled for us right now and for Christians of all time. This is our "today". It is the message that we are the poor, the blind, the captive, the oppressed and that the Gospel has good news to bring us. That good news comes to us through the ministry of the Church and sometimes we are called to be the ones who bring that good news to others as well. When Jesus said that the "Spirit of the Lord has anointed him;" we need to remember that in our Baptism, the Spirit of the Lord anointed us as well! It's now our mission to carry on his mission. We must look to the world around us to see who is poor, who is blind, who is oppressed, who is captive and we do what we can to fulfill this passage for them today.

- *Who are the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and the captive in your lives, families, offices, and friendships?*
- *How can the Lord minister to them through you?*