

## Weekend Readings & Reflections

### January 22-23, 2022 – Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Reflection:** *The meaning of today's liturgy is subtle and many-layered. We need background to understand what's happening in today's First Reading. Babylon having been defeated, King Cyrus of Persia decreed that the exiled Jews could return home to Jerusalem. They rebuilt their ruined temple (see Ezra 6:15–17) and under Nehemiah finished rebuilding the city walls (see Nehemiah 6:15). The stage was set for the renewal of the covenant and the re-establishment of the Law of Moses as the people's rule of life. That's what's going on in today's First Reading, as Ezra reads and interprets (see Nehemiah 8:8) the Law and the people respond with a great "Amen!" Israel, as we sing in today's Psalm, is rededicating itself to God and His Law. The scene seems like the Isaiah prophecy that Jesus reads from in today's Gospel. Read all of Isaiah 61. The "glad tidings" Isaiah brings include these promises: the liberation of prisoners (61:1); the rebuilding of Jerusalem, or Zion (61:3–4; see also Isaiah 60:10); the restoration of Israel as a kingdom of priests (61:6; Exodus 19:6); and the forging of an everlasting covenant (61:8; Isaiah 55:3). It sounds a lot like the First Reading. Jesus, in turn, declares that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in Him. The Gospel scene, too, recalls the First Reading. Like Ezra, Jesus stands before the people, is handed a scroll, unrolls it, then reads and interprets it (compare Luke 4:16–17, 21 and Nehemiah 8:2–6, 8–10). We witness in today's Liturgy the creation of a new people of God. Ezra started reading at dawn of the first day of the Jewish new year (see Leviticus 23:24). Jesus also proclaims a "sabbath," a great year of Jubilee, a deliverance from slavery to sin, a release from the debts we owe to God (see Leviticus 25:10). The people greeted Ezra "as one man." And, as today's Epistle teaches, in the Spirit the new people of God—the Church—is made "one body" with Him.*

### OPENING PRAYER

**Leader:** Welcome our discussion on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, let us begin this time in prayer:

**All:** O God, let your Spirit be upon us. Let us hear your good news of release, sight, and liberty, and rejoice together in your year of favor, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** When Isaiah says in prophecy that the Holy Spirit will send someone to bring good news to "the poor" and to "the captives," he is not talking only about people who are below the financial poverty level or those locked up in a jail. He is talking about a kind of spiritual poverty—awareness that our entire lives are completely dependent on God. And he is talking about those who are in bondage to sin and recognize that only God can liberate them from their sinful ways. In today's video presentation, we reflect on the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the announcement he makes to the people of his hometown. As you listen, imagine how you might have felt if you were present when Jesus was making his announcement.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org) - [Opening the Word – Third Sunday in Ordinary Time \(Year C\)](#))

### FIRST READING ~ Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10 ~

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it; for he was standing higher up than any of the people; and, as he opened it, all the people rose. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, "Amen, amen!" Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground. Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then

Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all the people: “Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep” for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”

*In the first reading the People of God were returning from exile in Babylon. They were a band of refugees returning to their religious home. Nehemiah was their leader helping the community to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Ezra was their priest leading the community in listening to the laws of God. Ezra is known for strict adherence to the laws of Moses and not allowing intermarriage. The people cry because they hear the law and have it interpreted for them so that they understand.*

- *Is there an area of the Church’s teaching which you may need to hear and have interpreted for you? What is it? Who could you ask for help? Why do you think Ezra tells them to eat and drink?*

## **SECOND READING** ~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 ~

Brothers and sisters: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, “Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, “Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.” Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

*St Paul continues teaching the community about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of the community thought they were better than others because they had the gift of tongues. St Paul teaches the gifts of the spirit serve the community and help it to truly be the body of Christ in the world.*

- *Do you feel your gifting for serving the Church is in the head (teaching), heart (caring), hands (serving), feet (missionary) of the Church? Do you accept and celebrate your gifts or are you jealous of others? How could you share your gifts this week? This year? In your parish?*

## GOSPEL ~ Luke 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."

*In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus begins his public ministry to the most difficult group - his hometown! Jesus is clear and bold in his vision.*

- *Do you have a clear sense of mission and purpose in your life and service of God? Jesus uses 50 words, what would you write in 50 words for your personal mission statement as you begin the year?*

*The Lord's year of favor is the 50th year (the Jubilee Year as established in Leviticus 25). Debts were cancelled, prisoners and slaves freed, land was returned to its original family ownership. The whole financial, social and political structure was renewed. The Jewish people called this the 'Tikkun Olam' meaning 'the repair of the world'. Repairing the world is an essential part of the work of the Church and every follower of Jesus.*

- *Allow this idea to enter your imagination for a moment. Do you consider healing the world as part of your consciousness and job description as a follower of Jesus? What area of need in the world attracts you or calls out to you? What has been your response so far?*

*This year we will journey with Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. A focus for Luke is Jesus' care and attention to those who are hurting, excluded, or downtrodden.*

- *If you were to look about in your family, community, wider society, who do you notice has been knocked over and hurt by life... and is now trampled on? The Gospel of Luke is also known as the 'Gospel of Mercy'. Mercy comes from the Hebrew word for 'womb'. Will you be moved to compassion for those in need?*

## MEDITATION

Luke begins his account by addressing his friend, Theophilus, a name which means "beloved of God" (Luke 1:3). In so many words Luke tells his friend (and us as well), I am writing to you the most incredible story humankind has known - and which many witnesses and messengers of God's word have openly explained on many occasions. Luke wants his friend and all who read his account to "know the truth" (Luke 1:4) concerning Jesus of Nazareth who was sent from the Father in heaven and anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring us the good news and power of God's kingdom. The word "gospel" literally means "good news." The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus

Christ and the new life and freedom he has won for us through his atoning death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection to everlasting life and glory with the Father in heaven. The Gospel is the all-powerful and all-merciful word of God for us today as much as it was for the people who first heard it in Jesus' time. It's a life-giving word that has supernatural power to change, transform, and bring freedom and healing to those who accept it as the living word of God.

Luke tells us that Jesus was about 30 years of age when he began his public ministry (Luke 3:23). Right after Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Spirit at the River Jordan (Luke 3:21-22), he spent 40 days in the wilderness to devote himself to prayer and fasting (Luke 4:1-13). At the end of this period of spiritual preparation and testing, Luke tells us that Jesus "returned in the power of the Spirit to his own land of Galilee" (Luke 4:14). Jesus chose to begin his public ministry in Galilee first, rather than in Jerusalem, the holy city and temple of God. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1,2.

Luke tells us that Jesus chose to publicly announce his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth. The people there were familiar with Jesus since it was his custom to regularly attend the weekly Sabbath service. Jesus was also known by many in Nazareth as a "carpenter" (Mark 6:3) and "son of Joseph" (Luke 4:21). When the president of the synagogue called on Jesus to read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus chose to read Isaiah's description (verses 1-2 of chapter 61) of what the Messiah would do when he came to restore God's kingdom for the people of Israel.

The Lord Jesus speaks this same word to each of us today - he comes to bring us healing and restoration, pardon and freedom from the oppression of sin, despair, hopelessness, and destruction. Do you believe his word with expectant faith and trust, or with doubt and indifference? The Lord will not refuse to pour out his Spirit on all who trust in him. Ask the Lord Jesus to renew in you the joy of the Gospel and the freedom to live each day with trusting faith, joyful hope, and fervent love.

- *Are you hungry for God's word of truth and mercy, love and forgiveness? And do you want to grow in the knowledge of God and what he has accomplished for us through his Son, Jesus Christ?*
- *Do you have anything to share from your meditations during the video? Were you able to place yourself at the scene? What did you feel or notice?*

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

**Leader:** In closing, let us pray for guidance to help in spreading the Gospel to those around us:

**ALL:** Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams. Through the gift of your Holy Spirit you bring us truth, freedom, and abundant life. Fill me with the joy of the Gospel and inflame my heart with a burning love for you and a deep thirst for Your Word. Amen.

**Leader:** (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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