

## **January 27, 2019**

Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Cor 12:12-30; Lk 1:1-4 & 4:14-21

### **REFLECTION ON THE MASS:**

After we have acknowledged the Body and Blood of Jesus present as the Lamb of God we prepare to make communion. At the exodus from Egypt, the families gathered and ate together a lamb. It was a symbol of unity and of the promise of God to save them - it was the first passover supper. Later, in the old temple worship, after the sacrifice on the altar was complete, the flesh of the sacrificed lamb was eaten by the priests and the people. This was a way to participate in the sacrifice that took away sins - it was a physical food to give strength to the body. Jesus instituted this worship of our Mass at the Last Supper - where the food is food for the soul. The Last supper was a passover meal, so it is linked to that Exodus from slavery and the freedom of following God. It is the way we participate in the one definitive sacrifice that Jesus offers in the ultimate temple in heaven. As we share the Eucharist we give thanks, we are bound together in one body, we celebrate the wonders of God saving us, and we participate in Jesus' sacrifice. As we approach we focus on the reality of this great gift. We receive our Lord reverently on the tongue or by making a sign with our hands to receive the king. This is a special time for prayer a time of special closeness as we have touched and received the physical presence of the unseen God. This climax is followed by final prayers, a blessing, and a dismissal. The priest leaves symbolizing Jesus walking forward, and we all follow - going forth to share what we have received in this Mass with others.

### **HOMILY:**

We have many opportunities to hear and experience the Word of God. Some of us may have heard the same passage many times. What we can forget is that we can hear a familiar passage in a new way, and that this can inform our lives in ways it did not before. When Jesus stands up to read in the synagogue it is an interesting scene. Jesus attended synagogue services at that same place for many years - and we hear that he read *as was his custom* - he was like a lector. He was one of the kids from the parish who was away for a brief time and was home. Him getting up to read must have been familiar, and perhaps people were saying "Oh look, it's little Jesus all grown up." They had heard this reading many times before and probably expected the rabbi would give a familiar sermon. Before the rabbi has the chance, Jesus asserts: *Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.* He was saying that this time what you are hearing is new. Before it was a prophecy of something yet to come, today it is now a reference to present day events. His coming changed the meaning of the scripture for the hearers (and for us) - as Christians, we cannot ever hear that passage as a reference of a thing that is going to happen, but as something that has already happened - he has come. Sometimes the

word of God has a new meaning for us. Sometimes the situation of the world, or of our life has changed to the point that a passage means for us something it never meant before.

In the first reading, Ezra is addressing the people who had just returned from exile. They had been living in a foreign land for generations, and as people who had lived in a country with a new language, their old language (Hebrew) had faded. A few generations into their time, mixed into another culture - without being able to go back to the old land - their grandchildren had forgotten the language. There were a small group who held onto it - Ezra was one of these. Now the important thing to know is that the scriptures were in Hebrew. They were not translated into the language that all the kids and grandkids, and great grandkids spoke. It's as if there was a family that came over from Germany bringing a family book of their history written in German. Sure mom and dad shared it with the kids they had in the US, but a few generations later, no-one in the family spoke German anymore. This was the case with the scriptures, this was the case with their history, this was the case with their faith tradition - the kids didn't know it or practice it. Ezra and the priests read and explained what they had missed - and they cried - they just found out who they were and what their duty to God was and how they should be worshiping and living. Sometime we hear a passage for the first time and realize that a change is in order.

In both of these cases the living word of God was either never heard, or had to be understood in a new way. We can each ask what could I do to more fully understand what God has taught? What opportunities could I use to gain a deeper understanding of what God has done, what God calls us to be, what God did when coming to us as Jesus Christ, and what we are called to do as members of Jesus' Body. What can we do to allow ourselves to understand these things better and place these things in the context of our current life situations? How can we engage in a continued process of formation and become more part of Jesus and Jesus' life?

Let's take a look at the second reading and ask these questions anew: Do we realize that we are part of a Body that we were united to at Baptism? Do we regard each member of that Body as valuable - each with specific roles, abilities, and importance to the full functioning of the Body? Can we open our minds more to hear what we have not heard before, or to re-understand what we know, and see where the Lord is calling us in that Body? This is our great dignity and purpose. To unite, to learn, to open to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (and to really find out what such a relationship is) and to participate in his mission. It requires openness; it requires a desire to hear the Lord. However, it leads to a greater self-knowledge, a greater action of Jesus in the world, and a greater depth of relationship with Jesus. It leads us to be like Jesus in the Gospel: the same kid who has been there, but now changed for the better.