

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Mission Statement, Jesus' and ours January 23, 2022

This Sunday, Luke (1:1-4, 4:14-21) presents us with Jesus' first act of public ministry. Following his baptism and his 40 days wilderness fast and temptation, Jesus returns to his home country Galilee. When he enters the synagogue on that Sabbath morning, everybody's eager to hear the local boy, whose parents Joseph and Mary have prepared him well for life. They raised him faithfully in their ancestral religion, brought him to the synagogue every week as a baby, a child, a teenager. Also reports about him have been spreading through the population, probably the result of his healing miracles and his synagogue teaching. So when Jesus is in the Nazareth synagogue, he is asked to read the lesson from the prophets. Jesus, searching for a familiar text, unrolls the scroll. In a voice strong with anticipation, he reads aloud:

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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Finished with this brief passage, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant, and takes his seat. People are looking at him wondering what he is going to say and they're astonished when he says: ***"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*** Jesus does the unexpected, the unimaginable. He claims those ancient prophetic words as his own personal mission statement. ***"God's Spirit came crashing down on him at his baptism empowering him to do precisely this: bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; let all the oppressed go free; announce that God's justice will reshape society."***

When Jesus reads that passage in the Nazareth synagogue, he announces a mission statement for himself and for his body, the Church. Everything that follows in his life, as presented to us in the gospel, amounts to the living out of the prophecy he claims for himself. He keeps doing these things every chance he gets, every time he turns around, until finally, it kills him. Some people welcome what Jesus does, but others do not because it upsets their authority, questions their complacency, and pushes them to recognize their habitual infidelity to God. They find their discomfort increasingly intolerable and think that his crucifixion will bring an end to the matter. They are wrong, of course. Jesus rises alive after three days from the dead and continues today to do what he talked about that Sabbath morning long ago.

Now the way he works is through his mystical body, the Church. Through each of us who are baptized into his body, Jesus still strives to live out his mission statement, bringing good news to those who don't have any, setting free those chained in captivity, opening blind eyes, helping the oppressed and exploited find a life, and unrolling the floor plan that sets out God's reign where justice and peace prevail. The poor gain hope, whether it's their souls or their bodies that are starved. The captives experience freedom, whether they are prisoners in a jail or prisoners in a mansion. The blind receive sight, whether it's cataract surgery at the church hospital or the scales of prejudice falling off the eyes of a bigot. The oppressed are set free, whether oppression is a political regime or a chemical dependence.

This Sunday's second reading (1 Corinthians 12:12-30) is another important passage about how the Body of Christ, the Church, is to live out the mission statement of Jesus. As we strive to keep faithful to those words Jesus read aloud and lived out, we can pay attention to three points that St. Paul insists: 1. All members of the church have gifts for ministry. 2. The members of the church have different gifts for ministry; we are not clones of each other. 3. The different gifts come to life in the context of the whole. Brothers and sisters, Jesus read the old words from Isaiah and claimed them for his own Mission Statement. We too can do the same, reading the old words from Isaiah as ***our Mission Statement: "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.

We Christians, no matter what denomination, are all given a mission to pray and to work together as Christ desires: ***"to catch people for the kingdom of God."*** But how can we carry out the missions? As Pope Benedict XVI said on the 30th World Mission Sunday, 29 April 2006: ***"Dear brothers and sisters, may the World Missionary Day be a useful opportunity to understand ever better that the witness of love, the soul of the mission, concerns everyone. Indeed, serving the Gospel should not be considered a solitary adventure but a commitment to be shared by every community."*** Our mission starts ***First, in the family.*** Each of us is called to build Christ's Kingdom in our family. What kind of parent would Jesus be? What kind of a brother or sister would Jesus be? Every Christian family should be a garden of light, goodness, strength, joy, and forgiveness, a real school of Christian virtue. ***Second, in the parish.*** The parish is more than a gas station where we come to fill up on sacramental grace. It's also more than a place where we punch our card every week. Every parish is an extension of Christ's incarnation in a concrete community. Each of us needs to ask God how we can contribute to parish life, how we can combine our time, talents and treasures in order to help the parish be a fruitful outpost of Christ's Kingdom. ***Third, the rest of the world.*** Our work place, our neighbourhood, our school, our sports teams... Everywhere we go we should be shining with the light of Christ in word and example. Welcome the new neighbour the way Christ would. Carry out our work responsibilities with a Christ-like integrity.

St Anthony the Abbot (251 - 356), whose Feast Day is on January 17, is also known as St Anthony the Great and St Anthony of the Desert. One day Anthony heard at Mass the words of Christ to the rich young man ***"If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have. Distribute the money to the poor. Then come and follow Me."*** After the death of his parents, Anthony, by inheritance, had money and property as the young man in the Gospel and seemed to him that it was God who had brought the saints to his mind, and that the words of the Gospel had been spoken directly to him. Immediately he left the church, and gave away to the villagers all the property he inherited, about 200 acres of very beautiful and fertile land. He sold all his other possessions, as well, giving to the poor the considerable sum of money he collected. However, to care for his sister he did retain a few things. He gave himself up to the ascetic life, not far from his own home. He did manual work because he had heard the words: "If anyone will not work, do not let him eat." He spent some of his earnings on bread and the rest he gave to the poor. He made this radical decision around 18 years old. He lived to be 105. ***As Christ-followers, regardless of our income level, we can share with others. Rather than rushing past a homeless neighbour or an unemployed friend, we can open our wallets and bless them. We can see them not as lesser but as equals. Humble our heart, Lord, when we think we are better than others. We know that all we have is a gift from you. Help us to share freely, generously. If each one of us is more and more like Christ in these three mission fields, God will do wonders, for us and through us. Amen.***