



OUR CHALLENGE TO LIVE IN HOPE AND REJOICING

Can you remember the democratic and republican conventions before our last presidential election? A candidate would take the stage, lay out his plan for leading the country, and periodically the people would stand up, applaud, wave their signs and flags, and use their noise makers to proclaim their assent to what was being said. They bodily expressed their hope and rejoicing over the message they received.

Each of today's readings is cause for the same kind of enthusiasm, the same kind of hope and rejoicing.

In the first reading the scene seems to be every bit as dramatic as the conventions. Ezra "brought the law before the assembly." "[H]e read out of the book from daybreak till midday." When he opened the scroll and blessed God, the people rose up, raised their hands and answered with what was a resounding "Amen, amen!" "Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the Lord, their faces to the ground"--- another dramatic gesture humbly expressing their assent and gratefulness to God. Ezra read from the book and interpreted it much like a politician reads from the constitution and proclaims what it means and how the politician and the people should uphold it. Later we are told the people are weeping, perhaps because of their lack of faithfulness in the past. Ezra is moved by this emotional response. It gives him hope, and he encourages them not to be sad. He tells them to eat, drink and be merry, allotting "portions to those who had nothing prepared."

In the Gospel today, much like Ezra, Jesus comes forward at the Sabbath day service and reads from Isaiah. Like Ezra, Jesus interprets this passage for them by saying, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is telling the people He is the Messiah, the one anointed by God, the fulfillment of all the prophetic promises. Jesus did not get an overwhelming response of joy to this proclamation. In fact, if you read on, you will find that the people rose up to drive Jesus out of town and led him to a precipice to be thrown over it. Today we know the rest of Jesus' story. We know his victory over death. Jesus' story warrants an enthusiastic, bodily expression of understanding, joy and commitment. We too are called to live out the fulfillment of the passage Jesus read. At baptism we were anointed; we became a disciple of Jesus called "to bring glad tidings to the poor.... 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." How do we do this today? Perhaps it has been or will be by bringing a faith perspective to reshaping the health care system of this nation, comprehensive immigration reform, to responding to natural disasters, to participating in restorative justice projects. The list is yours to make, limited only by your creativity. Rejoicing in Jesus' message and bringing it alive today is the response needed here.

We all have a role to play. Paul uses the body metaphor to make known our role as Christians. He is interpreting what he has come to know of Jesus and our call as disciples. All serve a purpose and contribute to the whole. Each one is needed, is to be respected, and rejoiced in.

What role do you play in the Body of Christ? How will you carry out Jesus' mission and subsequently our mission as disciples? How will you do this in the coming week? month? year? Think of the possibilities. Husbands and wives have an extremely important role in bringing God's love to one another. Parents are called to bring God's love to their children. No matter what occupation you have, you can influence for the good your fellow workers and the people you serve. In moments of play and relaxation, you can bring joy into the lives of others.



While attending worship in the Nazarean synagogue, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and declares Himself to be the fulfillment of the prophecy...Luke 1-14; 4:14-21