

Sunday Readings

the Year of Luke



*"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
(John 2:21)*

3rd Sunday Ordinary Time
Sunday 27th January 2019

notes

1. The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

2. **Cover image:** 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C – image from Missionaries of Sacred Heart, Peru.

3. **Lectio Divina:** reading GOD's WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us:

*"In the presence of GOD, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: 'LORD, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this?' Or perhaps: 'What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this Word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?'"*¹

The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this booklet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday.

There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order:

lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down.

meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words.

oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it.

contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation.

This booklet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*.²

4. **Review of the Week** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.

1 From paragraph 153 *The Joy of the Gospel* (Evangelii Gaudium) – Pope Francis (2013)

2 Mt.18:20

3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

27th January 2019

the messianic programme

introduction

As we gather to resume the normal pattern of life for the rest of the year, today's texts engage us in a response to the question, 'What does a refreshed disciple do?' The texts summon us to a life of new obedience. Luke introduces Jesus' announcement of GOD's *Year of Favour*. Hearing this announcement is hearing Jesus' call to embrace a life of wholeness. It's a call to live in obedience to GOD's living Law. It is to imitate the teaching and practice of the new covenant in Jesus – we complete GOD's Torah in our practise.

first reading: Nehemiah 8 : 2 – 6, 8 – 10

[Ezra summons the people to listen,
understand and respond to the Law]

Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month.(2) He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.(3) The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose (4a) . . . , And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.(5) Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great GOD, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.(6) . . . , So they read from the book, from the law of GOD, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.(8) And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your GOD; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.(9) Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."(10)

There is a parallel to Ezra's ancient liturgical order glimpsed in the synagogue at Nazareth (cf *Lk.4:16*) that survives still in our modern *Liturgy of the Word*. It includes standing at the reading of *the Gospel* – just as the people stood for the

reading of *the Torah* – as the religious reformer, Nehemiah, records in the reading. Nehemiah and Ezra represent a movement of reform to promote covenant ways. The reformers attempted to institutionalise their vision. They knew what the Israelite rulers had failed to learn; that their people's place in the world depended on respect for the LORD's covenant. Therefore Ezra summons the people to stand, listen, understand and respond to the reading of *the Torah*. (vv.2-6)

The purpose of Ezra's reading *the Torah* is to encourage a covenantal attitude when other visions of social ordering have displaced the covenant. The actions of Ezra could be interpreted as legalistic, narrowly cultic and sectarian – but the memory of loss of land through syncretism reinforced the reforming passion for covenant as the way to survive in history. Nehemiah's final statement represents the epitome of what the reform was seeking to do.³ The reform is an attempt to order life, community and land in covenantal ways. It was an attempt to avoid the Syrian-Hittite alternative, which would deny the Israelite's special destiny as GOD's people.

response: *Psalm 19(18) : 7 - 9, 14*⁴

[GOD's glory in creation and the Law]

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;(7)
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;(8)
the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.(9) . . .
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.(14)*

In a climate of oppression and coercion, even if there are no riots or public disruption, there is no real order. The Psalmist finds in GOD's Torah, the *shalom* or *peace* that human management cannot deliver. In an atmosphere of slavery, oppression and coercion, there is no real order. Rather, public life is closely and carefully supervised chaos. In contrast to the contained chaos of the Pharaoh, is the order of *shalom* - the justice of the LORD.

The speaker discerns that true order is a delicate balancing of GOD's gift of creation. The gifts of creation are not negotiable or at humankind's disposal. The principles of justice and mercy found in *the Torah (Law of Moses)* cannot be compromised. The power of a ruler is sometimes presented as a grant from the people. Sometimes it is presented as a grant from the LORD. That power can be held arrogantly – or it can be exercised for the benefit of the people. *Shalom* is

³ Ne.13:30-31

⁴ In Ps.19 The heavenly elements of the world, reveal the power and wisdom of their creator (cf. vv.2-7). The Creator's wisdom is available to human beings in the law (vv.8-11), toward which the psalmist prays to be open (vv.12-14).

the establishment of order – but a very special order. It is not the order as when all existence is given and ordained by "the gods". It is not order as technical mastery in which everything is made by humankind and is at humankind's disposal. It is order in the hassle of covenant obedience.

second reading: 1 Corinthians 12 : 12 – 30

[One body with many members]

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (12) For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (13) Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (14) If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (15) And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (16) 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? (17) But as it is, GOD arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. (18) If all were a single member, where would the body be? (19) As it is, there are many members, yet one body. (20) The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (21) On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (22) and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; (23) whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But GOD has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, (24) that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. (25) If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. (26) Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (27) And GOD has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. (28) Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? (29) Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (30)

Faithful covenant-keeping requires *an agent of order* and the apostle Paul performs that function for the Corinthians. His letters to them, serve to hold that community together until he could be with them to personally instruct and

correct. Its the function of *the agent of order* to arrange and administer power in the face of chaos and despair, so people can be human; that is, to live the image of GOD. The Torah brought together a dislocated people in Ezra's time. Paul expresses a new sense of community that has been brought about in a still more radical way. He uses as his image the human body, investing the image with the person of Jesus the Christ, as the central point of reference (v.12). The body in this imagery becomes the community of those, '*in Christ*' (vv.13-17). The apostle probably got the term '*body of Christ*' from Corinthian *Gnostics*. They used it to express the solidarity between Christ and the baptised. For the Corinthians, '*body of Christ*' came to express an identity between Christ and the believers. Paul accepts the truth behind this insight; but he tones it down. Christ is risen but believers aren't yet risen – therefore, according to Paul, the believers' salvation isn't an assured possession. They have to work at it through obedience to GOD (v.27). Paul's use of '*the body of Christ*' image means that disciples are to be dependent upon Christ and subject to his rulership. The comparison of human communities to a human body, in which each member has its own necessary function to fulfil (vv.14-26) was for Paul what being part of '*the body of Christ*' was in reality. The lives of believers shared a common destiny through the saving act of GOD in Christ and were under the rulership of Christ.

gospel reading: Luke 1 : 1 – 4, 4 : 14 – 21 [the dedication of the gospel . . . ,
and the beginning of the Galilean ministry and rejection]

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us,(1) just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word,(2) I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,(3) so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.(4) . . . , Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.(14) He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.(15) When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,(16) and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:(17) "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,(18) to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour."(19) And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the

attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.(20) Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."(21)

This is the preface to the two-volume work of *Luke-Acts* (cf. *Lk.1:1-4*) disclosing that Luke isn't an eyewitness to the events described in his gospel. The purpose of his telling about these events is to instruct Theophilus (vv.3-4). The evangelist begins his account with Jesus' engaging the world of despair. Luke alone of the gospel writers records the incident in the synagogue at Nazareth. It is a key to the whole of Luke's presentation of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus' mission is to be, "*the One who brings about GOD's reigning*": (v.21). By extension, the account establishes the mission of would-be disciples of Jesus.

When Herod came to power, the cities of Galilee would have received one of these '*good news*' messages. In Jesus' time the words '*good news*' was a political expression associated above all with the cult of the emperor. The emperor was considered '*a god*' and '*a saviour*' of the people. By using this term, Jesus indicates that he is announcing *the reigning of GOD*. The '*Year of Favour from the LORD*' (cf. *Is.61:2* & *Lk.4:19*) was also called, '*a sabbatical*' or '*holy year*'. It was a year of general emancipation of people and goods, which the LORD had ordered the Israelites to respect, every seventh year. It was the time that bought-slaves should then be released from their bondedness; all debts should be abolished; and land that had been sold, should be returned to its original owners.⁵

The aim of these measures, was to guarantee equality and freedom and to prevent the monopolising of land. The Torah later decreed that "*the LORD's Year of Favour*" should be every fiftieth year – *the jubilee*.⁶ Those who were oppressed are the only ones who understand the message. The afflicted and oppressed are called to announce '*the news*' as Jesus announced it.(v.18) At another time, Jesus gave thanks because GOD had hidden this '*good news*' from the '*learned and clever*' and revealed it to the afflicted and oppressed (cf. *Lk.10:21*).

items for sharing:

- *Ezra's liturgical order can be glimpsed in the synagogue at Nazareth, and survives today in our Liturgy of the Word – standing at the reading of the Gospel just as the Israelites stood for the reading of the Law. Comment on **Nehemiah 8 : 2 – 6, 8 – 10***

5 The *shalom* of a Jubilee Year, requires *an agent of vision*. According to the gospel, Jesus is, that agent of vision. He is the One who has no vested interest in the way things are. He has little effective power to change things, but he does have the vision of a new land, and a new people, in the new age. Jesus senses where the real *power-for-life*, or *grace* lies and will not be seduced by idolatry or self-interest.

6 There is little evidence that this law was ever carried out in practical life. But the prophecy of Isaiah was that the Messiah was going to announce the LORD's definitive *Year of Favour*. The '*good news*' is especially for the afflicted.

- *Faithful covenant-keeping requires an agent of order. Paul performs that function for the Corinthians to arrange and administer power in the face of chaos and despair, so that people can be human after the image of GOD. Comment on **1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 30***
- *Viable order and the 'shalom' of Jubilee Year require an agent of vision. Jesus is such an agent, who has no vested interest in the way things are. He has little effective power to change things, but he has the vision of a new land; a new people; a new age. He senses where the real power lies and won't be seduced by idolatry or self-interest. Comment on **Luke 4: 14 – 21***

prayer:

*LORD GOD, whose compassion embraces all peoples,
whose law is wisdom, freedom, and joy for the poor,
fulfil in our midst your promise of favour,
that we may receive the gospel of salvation with faith
and, anointed by the Spirit, freely proclaim it.
Grant this through our LORD Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
GOD for ever and ever. Amen*

review of the week:

Reformers like Ezra, Paul and Jesus escape the charge of narrow orderliness because of the breadth of their vision. They are the ones upon whom society depends for keeping the justice questions on the public agenda. They engage the world of despair and hopelessness. They intervene on behalf of the weak and act for their best interests. Such agents speak of GOD's '*life-giving power*' – a power both precious and precarious, but cannot be perverted. Such agents affirm the link between justice for the afflicted and GOD's holy purpose and power.

Agents of vision dare to affirm that the practice of justice results in order, whereas the practice of injustice leads to chaos. We tend to leave these tasks to someone else. We cannot imagine ourselves as such agents. Yet we host the announcement of the reformers' promise of a time of favour, each time we hear *the good news* read in the Liturgy of the Word and participate in praying the Eucharistic Prayer. The moment of worship is indeed, the time of GOD's Favour.

We can fail to realise that in the present, there is always a call to become the agents of the holy One. There is always a need to engage in the task of restoring vision and order in GOD's way. Without vision the powers of death triumph. Without justice chaos reigns. Without *the good news of GOD's reigning*, there's no future.

-----oooOooo-----