

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C
January 21, 2007

Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in his religion class at school. 'Well, Mum, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then he used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved.' 'Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?' his mother asked. 'Well, no, Mum. But if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it!' It is obvious that in our Gospel today, St. Luke is trying to give credibility to his written account of Jesus., to make it more "believable". As a well educated man, Luke knew the importance of this. I am sure in this environment, one of academia and higher education that such evidence or substantiation is also important. But we should not get ourselves lost trying to say that Luke has provided us with a documented history. If we try to reconcile the various accounts that we find in the four Gospels, we will become frustrated. So, we focus on the message.

Every Sunday as I read the three readings, I try to find the thread that runs through all of them. Why has the Church put these three readings together? Some times the challenge of figuring that out is difficult, but not today. What message do we find in the three readings?

Our first reading from the Old Testament introduces us to the traditional manner of gathering for worship. It comes after the Jews have returned from exile. Nehemiah and Ezra are two persons instrumental in bringing a scattered Jewish people together. The background of this reading is one of unifying the Jewish people

bringing order and unity to their existence and trying to establish some sense of community. It is a worship service in this tradition that Jesus will, as we see in the Gospel, stand up and read from the Scroll. Now it's not exactly the same because the first reading pre-dates Isaiah which Jesus reads from. But that does not change the fact that we see the development of the Jewish people acting together rather than scattered. Worshipping together forms a bond that holds the people together as a sort of unifying device.

Paul in his letter is also talking about the people gathered together as one. He introduces us to the body of Christ. Paul is telling us that we are all to act as one community, one people, the people of God. So, I think the readings fit together like this: the first reading is a pre-figuring of sorts of the Gospel. We see the effort to get the people together for worship. Paul then sort of ties the two together and gives us a great teaching about the Body of Christ. It is this great teaching on the Body of Christ that I would like to focus on for a few minutes.

Paul uses the analogy of the body parts. He talks about the ear, the eye, the foot and tries to get us to understand that all of the parts are important. There is an important message here because many of us go through life with a sense or feeling that we are not worthy of God's love. Many of us focus on our sinfulness and forget about God's forgiveness. What I see in Paul's teaching is that we are all important, equally important. Yes, we are all different, but we all fit together to make one body. All of the parts of the body have a function to serve the body in each part's particular way. Likewise, each of us has gifts that we have been blessed with and in these gifts, we find our own particular way to serve the body. So, today, it might be good to look at our gifts. How are we using these gifts? Are we serving others or are we hoarding our gifts to ourselves? Today is stewardship sign up day and today is the day that we offer our gifts to the community.

In the Gospel Jesus opens the scroll, reads and declares his intention to begin his ministry. Today we are each called to declare our intention by selecting a ministry to become involved in. Paul tells us that not all are called to be apostles and not all are called to be prophets, or teachers. He goes further to talk about gifts and says that not all are given the same gifts. It is the same way for us today. Just like a body relies on all of its parts working together, the Body of Christ relies on all of us working together to function properly.

As most of you know, I have only been here at Christ the King for a few months. But in these short months, I have come to see the importance of everyone's gifts. I came from a parish that was huge and had an abundance of people in all of its ministries. In fact one guy told me that he was only called on to lector about once every three or four months. Here, we have a different kind of community. We share the work load. I was so impressed during exams at the effort of all of the adults to keep the center open 24 hours with food and refreshments. I don't know what your gift is, but we need it, the community needs it. If you can assist at our liturgy that's great! If you can cook, that's needed also. Whatever you can do I assure you is welcome.

So, in a few minutes, we will take the time to fill out stewardship cards. I appreciate you willingness to offer your gifts. More importantly, I know that according to the law of sowing and reaping, if you sow the seeds of your gift, you will receive a great harvest.