

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Good News

In the Broadway musical *The Wiz*, the character of the Witch sings to her minions this marvelous phrase: “Don’t nobody bring me no bad news!” The Witch’s words are our deepest wish. We don’t want to hear bad news. We yearn for good news. It is life blood to us. Rejoice, then. Today’s liturgy is jam-packed with good news, just what we all want to hear.

FIRST READING: Nehemiah 8:2–4a, 5–6, 8–10 RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15
SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:12–30 [12–14, 27] GOSPEL: Luke 1:1–4; 4:14–21

Comment

Nehemiah and Ezra were the two major “reconstructionists” of the Israelite people after the Babylonian exile. Nehemiah was the governor, the political leader. Ezra, a priest and descendent of Aaron, was responsible for the restoration of the people’s religious life. Today’s first reading finds Ezra gathering the nation to hear the Law and to renew the Sinai covenant.

In the proclamation of God’s word, the returned exiles hear more than a narration. They hear a reaffirmation of their summons to be God’s people and a call to live out their chosen dignity: great good news!

The second reading continues the discourse begun in last week’s second reading. Paul is writing to the Corinthians to remind them that God has favored them with many gifts, but gifts intended not just for the good of the individual recipients but for the good of the community. Using the metaphor of the human body, Paul stresses how all parts must cooperate with one another because all parts—all people—are baptized in the one Spirit. Paul goes on to make his metaphor a reality, proclaiming the good news that his readers are, in fact, “the body of Christ.”

Today’s Gospel reading is made up of a section from the prologue of Luke and a section of Chapter 4. In the prologue, the evangelist explains his intent in writing his Gospel, namely, to verify the preaching of the good news and to establish continuity between the Old and New Covenants. The section from Chapter 4 finds Jesus in the synagogue of his hometown declaring that he is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant. Jesus’ declaration forges a link with the past and inaugurates a whole new age of great good news.

Reflection

At the very beginning of his ministry among us, Jesus outlined a model for living a life exemplifying good news. From the beginning, Jesus made it clear that his life work was to bring good news and comfort to the poor, proclaim liberty to all who were captives, give sight to those who were blind, liberate all who were oppressed, and bestow God’s favor upon all people.

From the very beginning, Jesus recognized that the greatest desire of the human heart is to possess a life of love forever with God. If Jesus had recognized and acknowledged that desire, but had not shown us how to realize it, his life and ministry would have been the cruelest form of false advertising. His gospel would have been anything but good news. But Jesus did show us how to realize it: by bringing comfort to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to blind eyes, freedom to the oppressed, and an invitation to all to the favor of God’s reign. Jesus’ life was a model of good news living. When we strive to live a life of good news, then, not only do we possess God, our greatest desire, but we also allow God to possess the hopes, dreams, and desires of all those we touch.

The mission of Jesus is given to us in baptism. That is favor and gift. The way we choose to return that favor, to use that gift, to live out that mission, is ministry. If our heart’s desire is the same as Jesus’, then our ministry will be remarkably like his. Oh, not in manner, or clothes, or speech, or dress—all those unimportant things—but in action, intent, relationship, and decision—all those most important things. The ministry of someone who cherishes the life of God within and who strives to exemplify that life to others is one of peace, reconciliation, passion, and compassion.

Reflection on the Weekday Readings

MONDAY, JANUARY 25

FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF PAUL, APOSTLE

Down but not out

The life of Saint Paul is a study in contrasts. He went from being a respected Jewish teacher with the power to haul Christians to jail, to a blind man lying in the dust, to a great apostle of the one whose followers he had hunted down. The force of his conversion echoed the violence he had used against the followers of Christ: A flash from the sky threw him to the ground and blinded him; he didn't eat or drink for days. When he recovered and began to preach the gospel of Jesus, some Christians could not believe one of their worst enemies had become a brother in Christ. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus laid upon him the "obligation," as he put it, to bring Christ's message to the world. How does your life, with all of its contrasts, proclaim your faith in Jesus?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Acts 22:3-16 or 9:1-22; Mark 16:15-18*

"He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel."

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

FEAST OF TIMOTHY AND TITUS, BISHOPS

With a little help from your friends

We can infer from Saint Paul's letters more about his fellow missionaries, Timothy and Titus, than we can about any of the original 12 apostles. Of Titus we know that his friendship with Paul was so deep that Paul's imprisonment was eased by Titus' comfort. How important friendship is, and how frequently neglected or misunderstood. In his book *Friendship* historian and theologian Martin Marty repeats this sentence often: "We have friends, or we are friends, in order that we do not get killed." With each repetition, he points to what threatens to kill us, ranging from anger, poverty, violence, or starvation to loneliness, ignorance, illness, or neglect. How lovely if, after a saint's name, one might read not only "bishop," "apostle," or "martyr" but also "friend."

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5; Mark 3:31-35*

"To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share."

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

FEAST OF ANGELA MERICI, VIRGIN

Support your local family

Saint Angela (1474-1540) was a big believer in the strength of women, the importance of family, and the need for adequate religious instruction. From an early age her goal was to support women in their vocations as mothers, daughters, and Christians. She eventually founded several schools in northern Italy to instruct young girls in Catholic theology and Christian living, and formed the Society of St. Ursula, dedicated to providing women of little social status with a sense of their dignity and a faith-filled purpose. Among her instructions: "Live and behave in such a way that your daughters will mirror themselves in you. And what you want them to do, do it yourself first." Good advice for all parents, guardians, and mentors of children.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 7:4-17; Mark 4:1-20*

"And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit."

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

FEAST OF THOMAS AQUINAS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

No question about it

Saint Thomas Aquinas intended his *Summa Theologica* to represent, as the title says, a "summary" of Christian theology. Seeing that this summary stretches to more than 3,000 pages, we would have trouble imagining what he left out. His attention to questions of faith is so thorough that he even devotes time to the issue of whether our resurrected glorified bodies will be agile (he concludes they will). What are some of the "odder" questions you have about the Catholic faith? Find the answers.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29; Mark 4:21-25*

"For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

You've got to start somewhere

Every year the CNN television network sponsors a program recognizing "everyday people changing the world." On Thanksgiving Day the top ten "CNN Heroes" are honored in a televised event. What is striking in each story is the extent to which one "small" person, like the mustard seed in the gospel parable, really can make a huge difference for the good. The nomination categories suggest ways each of us can make a positive difference: "championing children," "community crusaders," "defending the planet," "medical marvels," "protecting the powerless," and "young wonders."

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17; Mark 4:26-34*

"It is like a mustard seed . . . the smallest of all the seeds on earth."

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Readings for next Sunday's Liturgy: January 31: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13; Luke 4:21-30.