

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #69

READING I Nehemiah 8:2–4a, 5–6, 8–10

A reading from the Book of Nehemiah

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion.

He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it —for he was standing higher up than any of the people—; and, as he opened it, all the people rose.

Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, "Amen, amen!"

Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground.

Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.

Nehemiah = nee-huh-MI-uh

Begin with a solemn tone that suggests the exalted nature of this event.

Don't rush the details of how long he read and how many people listened.

The repetition of "men . . . women . . . children" is a mantra-like formula that lends greater dignity to the telling.

The scroll becomes a sign of God's presence and love, so the people show great reverence.

Take time with the telling of this sacred moment.

READING I The first reading recalls a key scene in the rebuilding of the people upon their return from Babylonian captivity: the scribe Ezra presents the book of the law. This ceremony represents the culminating moment of Ezra's effort to unify the returnees from exile and restore the consciousness of the covenant with God, which had always been the foundation of Israel's life. What remains of the Jewish people once their land is

annexed to the Persian Empire? The rebuilding of the temple has been delayed, the monarchy disappeared, and the properties of the exiles were occupied by squatters. A single institution remains, one that fostered the unity of God's people for centuries: God's Law transmitted by Moses. To mark the covenant renewal and the birth of Judaism, the priest Ezra solemnly proclaims this law, and the people agree to its conditions. Who cares if the city fortifications

have not yet been rebuilt; "rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength." Thanks to this law, faithful followers look ahead with hope. The public proclamation of the Word of God with its catechetical explanation is the essential element that will evolve into the synagogue service. For the first time after the exile, Israel gathers as a people, celebrates the proclamation of the word, and shares in a festive meal.

You are describing a unified experience of proclamation and preaching. "His excellency" = governor.

Speak these words with compassion, as you might address someone who's apologizing for arriving late to your wedding.

As always, first believe what you are saying, then proclaim it boldly.

For meditation and context:

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

Start slowly using the first sentence to set the stage for the theological point you will make. You're saying: What's true of our bodies is true of Christ and his Body the Church.

READING II

The central theme of today's readings is the Word of God proclaimed to the people. Ezra reorganizes the believing community after their exile by announcing God's Law. In the Gospel Jesus begins his public activity by commenting on sacred Scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth. In this reading, Paul explains how the Word of God shapes the Body of Christ and is manifest in the diverse charisms, gifts granted by God for

Then **Nehemiah**, that is, His Excellency, and **Ezra the priest-scribe** and the **Levites** who were **instructing the people** said to **all the people**:

"Today is holy to the LORD your God.

Do not be sad, and do not weep"—

for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.

He said further: **"Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD.**

Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15 (see John 6:63c)

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

Let the words of my mouth and the thought
of my heart
find favor before you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

READING II 1 Corinthians 12:12–30

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

[Brothers and sisters:

**As a body is one though it has many parts,
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,
so also Christ. »**

the good of the community of believers. He employs the analogy of the body to illustrate the function of the charisms—"As the body is one though it has many parts . . . so also Christ"—to affirm that the Church is "the body of Christ." The body incorporates both the uniqueness of each member and the uniformity of everyone together. Each member, in its singularity and uniqueness, is a part the body.

Paul stresses that Christ is one, as the human body is one, even though it comprises diverse members. Baptism inserts the Christian into Christ's resurrected and glorious Body, and the Church, the assembly of the baptized, is the manifestation and extension of his Body in the world. Therefore, the spiritual gifts and the diverse functions do not impair the unity of Christians; rather, they are a manifestation of the Church's inalienable wealth.

Stress the oneness that results from Baptism, which makes our differences less important than unity.

Be aware of the inherent humor in Paul's vivid analogy.

Varying your pace will help hold the listeners' attention. The details of the analogy ("If the ear should say . . . I am not an eye") can be spoken at a faster pace than Paul's points and conclusions: "there are many parts, yet one body . . . Indeed, the parts of the body . . . But God has so constructed the body."

Use eye contact to assure your listeners Paul is speaking about them as well.

Here Paul speaks of the "private" parts of the body that we cover with greater care. Don't belabor the point and keep the pace brisk.

Take a breath and renew your energy on this important line. You are reminding us that the seemingly less honorable parts can take on great importance.

This sentence requires a slower, more sober tone.

For in **one Spirit** we were **all baptized** into **one body**,
whether **Jews** or **Greeks**, **slaves** or **free persons**,
and we were **all given** to **drink** of **one Spirit**.

Now the **body** is not a **single part**, but **many**.]

If a **foot** should say,

"**Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,**"
it does **not** for this reason **belong any less** to the body.

Or if an **ear** should say,

"**Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,**"
it does **not** for this reason **belong any less** to the body.

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?

But as it is, **God** placed the **parts**,

each one of them, in the **body** as he **intended**.

If they were **all one part**, where would the **body** be?

But as it is, there are **many parts**, yet **one body**.

The **eye** cannot say to the **hand**, "**I do not need you,**"

nor again the **head** to the **feet**, "**I do not need you.**"

Indeed, the **parts** of the **body** that seem to be **weaker**

are all the more **necessary**,

and those **parts** of the **body** that we consider less **honorable**
we surround with **greater honor**,

and our less **presentable** parts are treated with **greater propriety**,
whereas our **more presentable** parts do not **need** this.

But **God** has so **constructed** the **body**

as to give **greater honor** to a part that is **without** it,

so that there may be **no division** in the **body**,

but that the **parts** may have the **same concern** for **one another**.

If **one part suffers**, **all** the **parts suffer** with it;

if **one part is honored**, **all** the **parts share its joy**.

Only through God's presence among us are we able to take this Word into our lives. Paul relates the amazing news that God's presence is not only with us, but within us. Through Baptism we have become the one body of Christ. We have been given to drink the one Spirit that gives the body life. Together as one, we are the sign of God's presence in the world. We have not only listened to the Word of life; through Baptism God's Word has taken up

residence within us, and it is our life. The Word that became flesh and lived among us is now visible to the world in the Body of Christ that we are.

GOSPEL

After Jesus reads from the scroll in the synagogue, he announces that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. The poor will be the privileged beneficiaries of the good news of the arrival of the messianic era. The Spirit

rests on Jesus, who will announce the Gospel to the poor, just as in Ezra's time the Jews expected a release, understood not as political emancipation, but freedom in the Spirit, which is the theological impact of Jesus' healings.

Paul's reflection on the body of Christ, formed by diverse members, is an image of the unity achieved in one Baptism. Another reason for unity is found in God's Word that nourishes and inspires us. Today's first

A faster pace is appropriate for this listing of roles, but don't lose a sense of the dignity of these God-given offices.

One idea is communicated through these multiple rhetorical questions. Use a brisk pace, but slow down for the final question and give it a tone of finality.

Luke's prologue is one long sentence comprised of several main and subordinate clauses. Keep in mind where you're headed as you vary your pacing and your emphasis. Luke's careful research is an important assertion.

Here, the text jumps from chapter 1 to chapter 4 of Luke. Renew your energy as you begin this section and emphasize the influence of the Spirit.

Jesus' initial acclaim and the spread of his fame are important to Luke.

reading emphasizes the assembly's attention to the Word. It recalls a dark period of history, when the people had lost the sense of the transcendence of their life. From among the ruins, in order to rebuild themselves as God's people, they opened to a plan of life that is not sketched out of reasons and projects, but of the attention to the Word of God. Nehemiah's assembly, hearing the Word of God, became sad. Ezra advised those who led the assembly,

Now [you are **Christ's body**, and **individually parts** of it.]
Some people God has designated in the **church**
 to be, **first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers;**
then, mighty deeds;
 then **gifts of healing, assistance, administration,**
 and **varieties of tongues.**

Are **all apostles?** Are **all prophets?** Are **all teachers?**
 Do **all work mighty deeds?** Do **all have gifts of healing?**
 Do **all speak in tongues?** Do **all interpret?**

[Shorter: 1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 27 (see brackets)]

GOSPEL Luke 1:1–4, 4:14–21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Since **many** have **undertaken** to **compile** a **narrative** of the **events**
 that have been **fulfilled** among us,
 just as those who were **eyewitnesses** from the **beginning**
 and **ministers** of the **word** have **handed them down** to us,
I too have **decided,**
 after **investigating everything** accurately **anew,**
 to **write** it down in an **orderly sequence** for you,
 most **excellent Theophilus,**
 so that you may **realize** the **certainty** of the **teachings**
you have received.

Jesus returned to **Galilee** in the **power** of the **Spirit,**
 and **news** of him **spread** throughout the **whole region.**
He taught in their **synagogues** and was **praised** by **all.** >>

"Do not be sad, and do not weep. . . . Go, eat rich food and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our Lord." The fruit of having heard the Word of God is a joyful life, because it is the extension of God's joy, a generous, fruitful life, because it is molded by the strong subtlety of the Word.

How many times in our lives, in moments of crisis or celebration, do we

allow ourselves to be questioned and enlivened by God's Word? Sometimes we get discouraged by the tremendous distance that separates the truth of God's Word and the condition of our lives. Tears flow freely because we feel so small in the face of the friendship with God and the coherent life we long for. But great work takes constancy and patience. Water by nature is soft and stone is hard, but when a water falls drop by drop on the stone, over time, it