

### Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2022 C

Maybe you've had the experience, while moving or looking for something else, of coming across a letter or picture or a postcard you haven't thought of for years. It was important enough to keep, but over time it had slipped your mind. Finding it again rekindles memories: sometimes joy, sometimes sadness, sometimes both because the relationships it reminds you of are no longer part of your life.

Something like this was happening with Ezra and the people of Israel who had returned from their exile in Babylon. During that exile, scrolls were lost, and the Torah, the Law of Moses, had become a fuzzy memory. The once-inspiring Covenant hopes linked to belonging to the Chosen People had gone dim through suffering and neglect. It's a little amusing to think of all those "men and women and children old enough to understand" standing around for 5 hours or more, listening to Ezra reading the Book of the Law. *Perhaps a few naps were taken.* But for most, ***it was the first time they had heard God's Word directly in a long time***, and they were overwhelmed to learn of a path to rebuild their community: not just city walls and waterworks, but to become once more a people rooted in the God's Word spoken to them.

On this Word of God Sunday, we too are invited to listen to the gift of the Lord's Voice as did the crowds 400 years after Ezra, in the synagogue at Nazareth. The Mass readings go by quickly, and sometimes the Scriptures are so familiar we tune out. It can be hard to hear them again ***as if for the first time***, to listen not just to human words but to receive the very Word of God spoken to us. ***In honor of the Word, today, think of your own favorite passage of Scripture*** – whether a Psalm or a parable of Jesus or maybe one of His miracles. Hopefully that will be a bit of a problem, where you say: "I have lots of verses I like – how can I pick just one?" It's good homework anyway. As a bonus, try to put the Gospel message into a single sentence. Among the dozens of books and hundreds of pages in the Bible, how would you explain simply, to someone who had never heard it, what God's Word is really all about? Love, redemption, healing, forgiveness, mercy – these are among the most used words in all those thousands of

words in Scripture.

But God does more than speak to us in words recorded on scrolls and held in memories. God makes that Word flesh. The perfect self-communication of God comes into our midst ***in Person*** in Jesus Christ. Ezra reading the Law of Moses, and Jesus reading the Prophet Isaiah, both conclude with the same assurance: ***Today is holy to the Lord Your God; Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*** ***Today***: not just remembering past promises, not just hoping for future help, but the living PRESENCE of God TODAY. In the Eucharist, that Word of God is taken into ourselves, not only through hearing, but by consuming the Body of Christ: a single Word received in two ways.

The Church's Gospel of Life is rooted in the same basic belief: that in every human life, in each person made in God's image, God continues to speak His creative Word of love and goodness. And as Jesus says, heaven and earth will pass away, but this Word of Life given to each person is a Word that does not pass away, for we are all created for eternal life. Last week, I had the funeral of a baby named Leah, who was born at 35 weeks and died just an hour later. Her parents knew for months that her life in this world would be brief; but they loved her, protected her, held her, had her baptized, and then all too soon returned that life to God. That was one of a handful of the hardest funerals I have celebrated. Casting about for something meaningful to say, that morning I read the reflection for the Day One of the 9 Days for Life novena from the U.S. bishops. The words were so perfect [quote]: ***“At every stage and in every circumstance, we are held in existence by God's love. The presence of an illness, disability, or other challenging situation never diminishes the value of a human life. God does not call us to perfection of appearance or abilities, but to perfection in love. Christ invites us embrace our own lives and the lives of others as true gifts. ... May our culture experience the power of God's transforming love, that all eyes may be opened to the incredible beauty of every human life.”*** [end quote] Those too are familiar

words; but Leah helped me understand them anew. She had no achievements, no possessions, no words: but she inspired for that reason the purest kind of love and goodness. That is the heart of the Gospel, and she proclaimed it more eloquently than I could ever hope to convey.

Today, Jesus spends time with us bring glad tidings in our poverty, release from our prisons, sight in our blindness, TIME acceptable to the Lord. May we know, TODAY, that this Scripture passage is fulfilled in our hearing.