January 27, 2019

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Cor 12:12-30 Or 1 Cor 12:12-14, 27; Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Domenico Di Raimondo, MSpS

In today’s readings, Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament, as well as Luke and Jesus in the New Testament, are engaged in fulfilling their mission. Facing a world that deeply needs salvation and good news, they decided to embrace everyone “men, women and children old enough to understand” and share with them words of life and hope.

Luke, in the Christmas Season, decided to engage his audience and offer them the big picture: the incarnation, the birth of Jesus, the shepherds’ visit, Simeon and Anna, the genealogy of Jesus from his parents up to God himself, his baptism and the days in the desert, and his return to Galilee. In all these events, there is a fine print that we need to consider carefully: all of them are possible by the powerful and, at the same time gentle guidance of the Spirit.

Today’s Gospel is no exception, it says that Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and, in his own town and among his fellow citizens, he presents his program of action: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor...” From then on, it is the Spirit who will guide him and who will give him to inspiration to go around preaching and healing, doing good works and making God present among the people. It is the Spirit who strengthened him until the end, and the gift that he gave to the women and men disciples, to be with them until the end of times.

Can you imagine Jesus’s experience while being in touch with the Spirit? Let us ponder the richness and depth of the relationship between the two of them! What did Jesus meant when he said that “the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because he had anointed him? What kind of dialogue could have gone between Jesus and the Spirit when things were going well in his ministry, and when he had to face opposition, rejection and death?

Let us take a step beyond Jesus. Today’s second reading, helps us to look at ourselves. Paul tells us that we belong to the Body of Christ because we have been baptized in the same Spirit, because we have been invited to drink of the same Spirit. He goes further to say that none of us is the same in the Body of Christ, but that every one of us is needed to build a new world. After
seen Jesus’s life, we can conclude that we, as part of his body, will be able to promote justice and peace in our world, only if we, like Him, are anointed, guided and in deep dialogue with the Spirit!

Is this possible?

Let us hear Sister Norma Pimentel, M.J., the executive director of Catholic Charities in the Rio Grande Valley, as she welcomed President Trump at the border, and invited him to see the work of staff and volunteers assisting people from throughout Central America who are seeking asylum in the United States. “We witness daily how, working together, people of all faiths can focus on helping the person in front of us.” “Regardless of who we are and where we came from, we remain part of the human family and are called to live in solidarity with one another.” “There’s a fear that paralyzes us, that makes us distance ourselves from seeing the reality of human life for what it is,” she said, and then added, “All we need to do is connect with our God. There is no law above God’s law.” A woman guided by the Spirit bringing good news to the poor!

Let me share with you the story of a 7 year old girl, from one of the parishes where I serve Sunday Mass. One day she was going back home from school. In the freeway, she spotted a homeless man at the side of the road. Immediately she asked her dad to stop the car by the man. He did. My little friend opens the window and says: “Sir, What is your name?” He responded. What are you doing here, it is dangerous for you. I do not have a home, he responded. Yes, I know, it must be very painful not to have a home! Then she reaches her backpack and says, Here, Sir, I was given 10 dollars for my birthday. I want to share with you half of it, so that you can go and have something to eat. There were tears in the eyes of everyone when they waved goodbye. Once again, a girl guided by the Spirit!

The story of what Saint John Paul II did to stop the war in Iraq, the letters and the persons he sent to Saddam Hussein and President Bush to avoid that ugly conflict, is also a beautiful example of a Pope full of the Spirit in the search of peace and justice, and so is Pope Francis visiting the border between our Nation and Mexico and delivering a strong message of love.

From this Eucharist, let us go back into our world, conscious that we have been given the Holy Spirit and that, with him, we are invited to change the world.

Ordained in 1978, Domenico Di Raimondo Romo, MSpS, has served in the fields of parish ministry, formation and leadership, and is the current Director of the House of Prayer for Priests in Orange, CA.