

Homily 145, Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21
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Sunday Jan. 24st, 2010
Nehemiah 8:2-4,5-6,8-10
1 Cor 12:12-30

“I do not need you” “I can live without you!”

Now that’s a great way to begin a Homily. But it is in today’s readings.

The three readings today bring us an inspired but critical look at our world today.

The first reading from Nehemiah is one of love. The Chosen people have just returned from the Babylonian captivity and they are professing their love of God and His law as they listen to His word being proclaimed by Ezra the scribe of Nehemiah. The second reading, from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian, talks of unity in our diversity. It talks about body part as the ontological reality of the mystical body of Christ. The Gospel reading is one of purpose, the purpose of Jesus as he unrolls the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read the passage that professes the purpose of His reality.

Scripture scholars might say that this is a flow, love, unity, and purpose. Naturally, being a Deacon, I will take them out of order by beginning with Paul’s reading on unity.

His point is that dualism is the enemy of our relationships. It is the enemy of the Church. It is the enemy of our families, our communities, and our nation. Dualism basically says that we are different and not only different, but we are separate. It says that I am unique, and different, and not dependent on you. You are not important and we are not connected.

The dualist said the body and soul were different and separate; the best thing was for the soul to be rid of the body. This precipitated St. Augustine’s response of the embodied soul; although separate, the natures depend on each other. Our society does not profess that how ever. It is like the body parts that don’t think they need each other. Or because they are not like, the other parts do not belong to the body. The theological principle says that the Church, the mystical body of Christ, depends on all people. All the parts of the body contribute to the whole.

Let me make it even more complicated by saying that the strength of the whole is dependent on the strength of the individual parts. The Church, the mystical body of Christ, is no stronger than the sum of the individual members of the Church. The role each of us plays in God’s plan is dependent on the role each of the others plays. What is a deacon with out a priest; what is a shepherd without a flock; a giver without a receiver; a Father without a son; a doctor without a patient; a teacher without a student?

The strength of American is dependent on the unity of the states, the family the unity of its members, the Church the unity of believers. Unity is not commonality. It is about as ridiculous as all the children in a family being the first-born or thinking that you are second best if you are not the first born. Personally as the first born myself, I wished I had been the last-born. Mom and dad were easier on Mark. He got a dog, he could stay out longer, he got mom's convertible. I got the 57 for station wagon with no air condition. Now isn't that petty, but then if we are seriously considering this, any attitude that professes we must be alike to be in unity is ridiculous.

Paul was not pointing to commonality. He did not say that all parts of the body needed to be eyes, or all the parts need to be hands to have unity. He said the truth is unity in our un-commonality, unity in our diversity; that all of us in our uniqueness contribute to the completeness. On the other hand, we have a society based on you have to be like me, think like me, dress like me, look like me, in my case a community of short, white, mid life deacon with kids. When we all want to be like each other, our unity in Christ is weakened.

It is interesting that the flow of these readings brings us to the answer of unity in our diversity in the Gospel of Luke. Tradition says Luke was a Doctor; Dr. Luke, healer of the body. The passage of his gospel points to the basis of unity; unity in diversity comes because of our beliefs and our purpose. As I said in the open, Jesus rose in the synagogue to unroll the scroll of Isaiah and read his purpose and unity with the Father. (Pick up the Gospel Book and read) *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.* It is our belief in the truth of our faith and the fulfilling of the purpose that bring unity in our diversity. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Ad Petri* _____ says that, "it is the ignorance of the doctrines of our faith that threaten God's work on earth more than anything else."

I am often so humbled in my ignorance. Last Wednesday I was in South San Francisco on a business trip. As I often do, I used Mass Times .org to find a church close to the hotel where I was staying. (Mention the service again). I found St. Augustine's Church 8:40 am, Daily Mass. With my rental car in tow and GPS set on 3700 Callan street I arrived at the church early. Good time for some reflection to get me in the mood to meet my Savior in the Eucharist.

As I entered the church it was full of Asian Americans, older Asian Americans. My heart sunk, this church didn't look Asian from the outside. How will I participate in a mass in mandarin? Then Christ spoke to me. These are my people too. They are the heart of the mystical body of Christ you are the hands Thom. Come on in to be with us. As I walked up the long isles, their broken English caught my attention; they were participating in the morning liturgy of the hours. They were doing it in unison and the beauty of their voices brought a shameful tear to my eye. The mass experience in that community was centered in the mission of Christ, the purpose of Christ, the Unity in our diversity. I joined in, lowering my voice to almost a whisper, for they were so wonderfully soft in their embrace of the liturgy of the hours. Mass started, two Asian Priest came out singing. It was a spiritual encounter as they celebrated together. I was not an intrusion to them, I was part of their community; they waved at me. I was actually the tallest person in the Church. They hugged me at the sign of peace. As I left St.

Augustine's that morning the Truth of the today's reading washed over me. Love, Unity, Purpose.

In our diversity, the unity of our beliefs, the love we have for each other, and the living out of our God given purpose unites in the mystical body of Christ, our Church, our Family, our world.

What are we to do to bring today's scripture readings into our daily lives?

First we must focus on what unites us rather than what makes us different. Focus on what we like rather than what bothers us. What unites us as Catholics in the mystical body of Christ, the church, is our belief in Christ as our savior, in the sacramentality of our liturgy and in the universality of our love.

Second, elevate our activity to purpose. What God has called each one of us to contribute as a uniquely individual member of the community in the overall purpose of eternal peace? As a community our common purpose is to work toward and contribute to the salvation of the community. Pray for the community, serve the community, educate the community, support the community, and participate in as many activities as you can in the community. What is the purpose that God has ordained you to in your faith?

Third we must educate ourselves in doctrine formation; forming ourselves in our common beliefs. St. Augustine chastised us as a people who become ignorant in our faith because we discontinue our learning. Can you imagine a doctor or teacher who suddenly quits learning or preparing themselves to help others? We do it in relation to our faith. When I entered Diaconate formation, I was embarrassed by how little doctrinal formation I had. To love someone is to know them and to know them is to love them. How can we love my Church and Christ if I quit learning about them?

It all takes time, and we all say that we don't have time, but in everyday we all have the same amount of time in that we are all equal

For I do need you and you do need me, we need each other in our faith journey.