



THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year C
January 24, 2010

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-30
Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

GATHERING

(An unlit candle, a small bouquet of brightly colored flowers and several pairs of eyeglasses are arranged on a table in the gathering place.)

If new members are joining the community, some time is taken for people to become acquainted and for newcomers to learn something about the history of the community. All share their hopes and expectations about being a part of a small church community.)

This week the scriptures call us to be people of mercy, redemption and unity.

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader invites members to acknowledge themselves in the presence of God. After some time of silence, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: I have traveled a long way...

All: You must be tired. Come. Sit. Rest.

Leader: I have endured much, seeking the Master of Love.

All: Take this bread. Eat. Take this wine. Drink.

Leader: Who is your Master?

All: Our Master is the Christ.

Leader: Where does he stay?

All: Among us. Around us. Within us.

Leader: Where can I meet the Master?

All: He lives wherever you find mercy, redemption and unity.

Leader: Then may I stay here? For in you, Love has come to life in me.

All: Be at peace.

*(An instrumental selection from **MusicQuest** is played.)*

Focus question

- ◆ Recall a time in your life when you were unwelcome or excluded.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

When we have eye trouble, we visit an optometrist. When they are needed, we are prescribed corrective lenses. As Christians, we are always being challenged by the gospel to see things in a new way. This week's readings are like corrective lenses for the eyes of the heart, helping us focus more clearly on the big picture – God's desire for mercy, redemption and unity.

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "If you look deeply at the garbage heap with the eye of meditation you can see lettuce, tomatoes and flowers.

That is exactly what the gardener sees when he looks at the garbage heap, and that is why he does not throw away his waste materials.”¹

In Nehemiah, the Jews rebuild the wasteland of Jerusalem. Their relationship with God has been challenged by 70 years of Babylonian captivity. They are burdened with feelings of ritual impurity. All gather for somber prayer. But as the Torah is read, they recall a radically merciful God who renews and sustains. The religious instruction – Feast! Share! Celebrate! We are once again, one with God.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians uses the imagery of the body to correct a fragmented communal vision and unify a socially diverse and contentious community. Paul teaches that Christians are one inter-dependent people. Where one suffers, all suffer, where one rejoices, all rejoice. Each has purpose and dignity and no one is *less than*. In Christ, we all belong; we are brought together and made whole.

In the gospel, Jesus unrolls the scroll. The text says, “He *found the passage* where it was written...” Jesus deliberately uses the powerful lens of Isaiah to open eyes, minds and hearts to the messianic promise of God’s mercy and compassion, “fulfilled in their hearing” and embodied in Jesus, *our* Master Gardener.

Amid the seeming “garbage heap” of humanity, God sees flowers. Jesus sees the kingdom of God breaking in. As you look around your world, our world, these days, what do you see?

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION²

- ◆ Tell of a time when you felt separated, *exiled* from friends, family members, social or professional groups or even from God.
- ◆ How have you experienced forgiveness and reunion in your life?
- ◆ How conscious are you of being a member of the “body of Christ”?
- ◆ How have you served as an instrument of unity to those who are

¹ **True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart**, Thich Nhat Hanh, Shambala Publications, 2006.

² Members should feel free to speak to any question(s) they choose. It is not necessary for the questions to be taken in the order they are presented. Not every question needs to be considered in a given session. In addition to the questions suggested, there are always universal questions that may be brought to any scripture: How does this scripture encourage you? How does this scripture challenge you?

marginalized in your family, work place, social groups or parish?

- ◆ How might your vision of community need to change to be more inclusive of others?

RESPONSE IN ACTION¹

- ◆ Seek out and dialogue with individuals and/or groups of different faith traditions. Learn more at www.pluralism.org/.
- ◆ Begin a *Circle of Listening* to positively address differences within your parish community. Find resources at The National Pastoral Life Center web site (www.nplc.org).
- ◆ Revisit the Catholic Church's teachings on spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Learn about the Catholic position on immigration reform at: www.justiceforimmigrants.org/learn_issues.html.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

*(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the gospel of the week is re-read by a member of the community. Following the reading, the leader poses this question to the community: “**What does Christ say to you/us in hearing this gospel today?**” The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them in this gospel. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them.)*

*When this prayer and sharing is complete, members join in singing the **MusicQuest** selection, “Ang Katawan ni Kristo” See p. 90 for lyrics.) When the song is complete, the community prays as follows.)*

All: Open our eyes O, God, to one another. Remove the scales that keep us blind. Make us agents of love for each other, ministering Christ to all humankind. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

¹ While a number of the action suggestions are particular to the Archdiocese of Hartford, we have also made an effort to include 800 numbers, addresses and web site information to accommodate those in other parts of the country. In the absence of that information, we encourage **Quest** users elsewhere to let their imaginations lead them to implement comparable actions where they live.