

10 JAN 2020 - Friday after Epiphany.

*1 Jn 4:19-5:4; Luke 4:14-22a*

*To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord... Today this Scripture has been fulfilled...* Our Lord is given Isaiah to read, a book full of Messianic prophecies - what are the people of Nazareth expecting? Our Lord himself finds and reads the first couple of verses from Isaiah Chapter 61. This might be described as Jesus's mission statement. This proclamation is his whole reason for coming.

So, what is this, "*acceptable year of the Lord,*" and how is it "*fulfilled*" in their hearing? Jesus is proclaiming the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the endless Sabbath, the Seventh Year of Seventh Years, the eternal rest in the Promised Land. From where does all this arise? It goes back to the Creation. On the Seventh Day God rests, and unlike the other days, there's no evening and ensuing morning. The Seventh Day of Creation is the Day without ending, in other words, God's eternal rest - paradise. Man's sin, however, puts an end to this endless rest. Exile ensues, and labour for survival, and then murder and sins abound.

After the Fall, man is exiled from paradise, and every time he is restored and his sins forgiven he falls again. After the Flood, God promises he will not destroy the human race, but we sin again. After the Fetters of Egypt, God liberates the People of Israel, drawing them, through the wilderness, to the Promised Land. Having achieved the Promised Land, though, they do not obey God's commandments; instead, they sin, worship false gods, exploit each other, strive against each other, and are finally exiled from the Promised Land to Assyria and Babylon. Even upon their return to Israel and Judah, they still do not amend their ways, and so they are in a sorry state by the time of the Incarnation, under Roman occupation. Having the Law as given through Moses is not enough to stop sin.

To those hearers at Nazareth, this proclamation of the Jubilee stirs up all that background. Proclaiming liberty to captives could be taken as rebellion against Herod, the corrupt Temple, and Rome. To people under the iron heel of oppression it probably all sounded wonderful, but possibly also a little terrifying. Jesus did not mean, though, that God would return everyone back to some kind of Empire of Israel, to a physical Promised Land, expelling the Romans, restoring the monarchy, purifying the corrupt Temple, getting rid of the Herodians. The problem with doing all that, easily achievable for God, would have been that a little while later, the Israelites would go back to idolatry and sin; then God would get angry and expel them again. It would inevitably all fall over. That aim is too low, the hope too small. Something radically other is needed, and perhaps from bitter experience they all knew this deep down.

In this proclamation, Our Lord wasn't proclaiming a return to some earthly paradise. Jesus, after all, said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," No, rather, Christ is saying that "*The Son of man is lord of the sabbath.*" He is the Lord of God's Rest, the Announcer, the Angel of the Jubilee - the acceptable year. Jesus has come into the world, not to set up a nation, but to draw us to the true Sabbath - the eternal freedom - heaven. He fulfills his mission by resting in the tomb on the Seventh Day, and then, on the First/Eighth day - manifests the New Creation. He rises, the Sun of Righteousness, never to set, never to end. That Day of Resurrection is the New, Eternal Day. This is the new birth, born of God! As Saint John says, *Whatever is born of God, overcomes the world.*

So, this is why he comes, to announce and make available to us the endless Jubilee in Heaven, the true Promised Land, from which our sin had us exiled. By his redeeming Cross and Resurrection, for us captives to sin and death, he achieves our release, opens our eyes to see the Beatific Vision, gives us the liberty of new life which begins with our Baptism and is consummated in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. He who is manifested in Bethlehem to shepherds and the magi, *This is he whom seers and sages sang of old with one accord*, whom Isaiah foretells; this is the Word made flesh, who in these gracious words proceeding out of his mouth in Nazareth, manifests himself as the God who wants us to rest with him for ever. This proclamation is an Epiphany of God. Though no physical star appeared over that synagogue, the true Day-Star shone bright and clear. Therefore, we must have faith in the Lord of the Sabbath, because he proclaims to us this good news that he has come to take us to our true home with him in heaven, the endless, "acceptable year of the Lord"; the reign of the kingdom of love.