

EPIPHANY 3- 2022  
Nehemiah 8:2-6; 8-10  
1 Cor 12:12-14;27  
Lk 1:1-4;4:14-21

St Luke tells us that following his baptism and empowerment with the Holy Spirit, Jesus spent time in the wilderness reflecting on his mission. He resisted the temptations to follow an easy path and chose the hard path of love. At first his ministry went well. He preached that the Kingdom of God was near and he healed many sick. People were ecstatic. Jesus was a sensation. The 'honeymoon' period could on for years.

However there was a danger in this. Jesus' healings only touched the physical bodies and mental condition of the afflicted. His real mission was to make people face the demands that God made on their souls. The first blow in this change of direction occurred in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. He had been asked to read from the Scriptures and the preach on the reading.

In his gospel St Luke quotes Isaiah's comforting news about the promised healings of the age of the Messiah who would come to 'proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Isaiah 61:1-2). You can imagine the delight that the congregation would have because they had heard about the healings in other towns. And here is one of their own boys delivering a wonderful homily. It is interesting that Luke omits the next few words of the quote from Isaiah which says that the Messiah will also announce the 'day of vengeance of Our God.' The mood in the synagogue changes, but you will have to wait till next week to hear why. People are happy to receive blessings and gifts from God, but are less keen on persevering with living with the hard challenges of God's demands on us.

Several hundred years before Jesus preached in Nazareth, the Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon realised that their exile was due to their ignoring the Law of Moses. Nehemiah, who visited them from Babylon, was determined they wouldn't ignore the Law again, so he lined the people up in a city square and made them stand there and listen while Ezra read the Law to them. It took all day! God's laws are not intended to be a set of restrictions but guidelines outlining what kind of community God's people should be. Once the boundaries are set, there is freedom within them.

The tension between individual rights and community responsibility, which is a current issue for us, is not new. Restrictions and mandates we live with in this time of Covid are external limits which will always be challenged, but Jesus taught that the internal law of love is what should determine how we live. When making choices, the question Jesus poses is, "What does Love require of us?" Individual rights always come with responsibilities, whether in the Church or wider society.

St Paul does not describe the Church as a body of people, but as the body of a person, namely Jesus Christ. Through baptism we become a valued and essential part of Christ's body. We already know that our own body can only function effectively if there is interconnectedness and interdependence between its individual parts. The failure of one

organ or limb affects the whole. In Christ's body, each disciple is called to his or her particular ministry. Each disciple is empowered with gifts from the Holy Spirit. No single gift is given to everyone and no one disciple possesses all the Spirit's gifts. Gifts must be received and used if they are to be beneficial to the recipient and to others through that recipient. This is why the Church needs all our gifts to be offered if we are to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world.

In difficult times it is easy to 'throw in the towel.' Yet all times are difficult because evil still makes its presence felt. We must stand together because we need each other so that the gospel of salvation proclaimed by, in and through Jesus, is able to draw others into his body of active disciples.

It is love that must determine our choices. Not all the choices we make lead to eternal life, but those that are guided by love will.

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