

[64] **THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME** C

FIRST READING

They read from the book of the law and they understood what was read.

A reading from the book of Nehemiah

8:1-4a, 5-6, 8-10

All the people came together
and stood in the open area in front of the Water Gate.
They asked Ezra the teacher to read to them from the Law of Moses
that the Lord had given for his people.

So on the first day of the seventh month
Ezra the priest came with the Law
and stood before the crowd of men and women.
Everyone who was able to understand was there.
From early morning till noon
Ezra read the Law of Moses aloud in front of the Water Gate.
They all listened carefully,
as Ezra stood and read from the wooden platform
that had been built for him.

The platform was very high,
and everyone could see Ezra as he opened the Book of the Law.
And when he opened it, they all stood up.
Ezra praised the wonderful Lord God,
and the people shouted, "Amen! Amen!"
They bowed low to the ground and worshiped the Lord.

The men who were on the platform with him translated what he read
and explained to the people what it meant.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher,
and the Levites who had been teaching the people
all said, "Don't be sad or cry!
This is a special day for the Lord your God."
They said this because the people cried when God's Law was read to them.

Nehemiah told the people,
"Enjoy your good food and wine
and share what you have
with everyone who didn't have any to bring.

Don't be sad!
This is a special day for the Lord,
and he will make you happy and strong."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

19:7, 8, 14

R. (see John 6:63c) Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.

The Law of the Lord is perfect;
it gives us new life.
His teachings last forever,
and they give wisdom
to ordinary people.

R. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.

The Lord's instruction is right;
it makes our hearts glad.
His commands shine brightly,
and they give us light.

R. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.

Let my words and my thoughts
be pleasing to you, Lord,
because you are my mighty rock
and my protector.

R. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.

SECOND READING

Together you are Christ's body,
but each of you is a different part of it.

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians

12:12-14, 27

Brothers and sisters:

The body of Christ has many different parts,
just as any other body does.
Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles.
Some of us are slaves, and others are free.

But God's Spirit baptized each of us
and made us part of the body of Christ.
Now we each drink from that same Spirit.
Our bodies don't have just one part.
They have many parts.

Together you are the body of Christ.
Each one of you is part of his body.

The word of the Lord.

ALLELUIA

Luke 4:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor
and freedom to prisoners.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL

Today this scripture is being fulfilled.

† A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke

4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Spirit.
News about him spread everywhere.
He taught in the Jewish meeting places,
and everyone praised him.

Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath.
When he stood up to read from the Scriptures,
he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet.
He opened it and read,

“The Lord's Spirit has come to me,
because he has chosen me
to tell the good news to the poor.
The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners,
to give sight to the blind,
to free everyone who suffers,
and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’”

Jesus closed the book,
then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down.

Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.
Then Jesus said to them,
“What you have just heard me read has come true today.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle C

Prayer: Dear God, This week we remember all Christians are our brothers and sisters. We are one in your love. Help us to love each other all the time. Thank you for calling us to be your Body. AMEN

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; Ps 19: 8-10, 15; 1 Cor 12:12-30;
Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Reflection: The Week of Christian Unity began on January 18 and continues through 25.
THEME: He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. Mark 7:37

In 1908, Paul Wattson suggested these dates to cover the days between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have symbolic meaning.

Catholics have been engaged in ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE with more focus since Vatican II.

We share much in common with our Christian brothers and sisters.

Our Scripture readings from Nehemiah and Luke are in liturgical settings. In the first, Ezra reads “plainly from the book of the law of God” and also interprets it. Everyone must understand what is being read. It is mentioned twice to whom the reading is directed: “Men, women and those children old enough to understand.” Then, in the Gospel, Jesus picks up the scroll and reads from it and then offers an interpretation. Each story clearly reflects the deep meaning of an earlier message which is carefully being explained in the present moment. This is the same for our Sunday liturgy of the Word: We hear the word of God and have it interpreted for us during the homily.

The Nehemiah reading challenges people to learn from their ancestors' sinfulness, bad choices and mistakes and believe in God's way and strength. The bottom line of the message is clear: “Today is holy...do not weep...rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!” In other words, they are to “learn from your mistakes and know God is merciful.” We don't need to be burdened by what we do wrong but rejoice in God's grace ‘to start over again.’ That's not always so easy—even Jesus has a difficult go of it. This Sunday's gospel passage unfolds, a few verses later, and Jesus is driven out of town.

The Gospel reading tells of Jesus' return to his hometown. Now, a grown man, he reads from the scroll and comments on the message. But the reaction is clear: “...and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.” The next verses spell out the disapproval: “Don't try to tell us what we don't want to hear!” They couldn't and wouldn't let Jesus be other than they thought of him. They couldn't and wouldn't let Jesus do miracles or be the Messiah. Even for us today, don't we sometimes have a very hard time letting an insight into our way of thinking of God teach us something new in our understanding? Don't we still hold back and say, “Well I'm not really sure that's what God is like or wants?” Don't we limit ourselves and aren't we always ready to ‘grovel’ more than we need to? Haven't we heard ourselves say: “Who does s/he think s/he is?”

Then, even for the children, don't we sometimes compete with our understanding of God?
(continued on page 2)

My God is better than your God!! As we celebrate this week of Christian Unity, let us pray that the importance of having Jesus, God's Son as our Savior and Brother takes root in our hearts and minds and allows us to walk, pray and celebrate with our Christian brothers and sisters.

If we truly believe we are to be one Body in Christ, then we each have to accept each other and see the good. We have to be willing to look deeper into ourselves and be willing to admit mistakes and forgive. The ultimate goal of being ONE BODY in CHRIST is a daunting challenge. It must begin in each of our hearts and minds. We must be open to the challenge and the mission to be ONE BODY.

Activities: Draw an image of a body. Above the 'body' write the words: ONE BODY IN CHRIST. Write the word, Jesus, where the 'head' is; then write the names of Christian churches that the children would know in various parts of the body. (For example: Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, etc.) Talk about what we have in common: We believe in one God; in Jesus his only Son; Jesus died for us; Jesus offers us forgiveness and place with him in heaven; we believe a person needs to pray, be a good moral person and care for the poor and underserved of the world. Help the children to understand that no differences are so great that we can't learn from each other, support each other and love each other since we are one in the Body of Christ. The division in the body of Christ lies in the differences among human beings in understanding all that God offers us in Christ Jesus. But there is great love, faith and hope in celebrating our basic truths: Jesus Christ is Lord of heaven and earth.

To Conclude the Session: The Lord's prayer is a commonly shared form of praying together among Christians—even though we pray the ending a little different. As Catholics we find it a little more uncomfortable to "just pray from our hearts." Invite each child to give voice to a prayer from their heart asking Jesus to help us be ONE. If time allows, as a group might write a prayer for Christian Unity and share it with your other Christian friends or put it in the bulletin next week.

Prayer: Dear God, We know you are the Creator and God of everyone. Help us to accept and love people who believe things we don't believe. May all of us believe in your love and forgiveness and offer that gift to you each day. AMEN.