

Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ord.  
Jan 23-24, 2010 "C"

The event described to us in today's First Reading is **truly amazing**. It took place around **450 BC**. The people of Israel had returned to Jerusalem after **70 years of exile** in Babylon. And then an entire generation had spent **decades** rebuilding the ancient Jewish **Temple** and reconstructing the protective **walls** around the holy city.

The walls were finally completed under the leadership of **Nehemiah**, the Jewish adviser to the king of Persia who had become the official governor of Jerusalem. To celebrate, Nehemiah and Ezra, his top religious adviser, arranged for a **day of prayer and renewal of faith**. It was a sort of Day of Reflection for the Jewish People.

The inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area **gathered** for a public reading of the Law of God, what we today call the Old Testament.

This is amazing for **two** reasons. First of all, it is amazing that God's Chosen People, the Israelites, had **survived** as such a tiny nation for 1500 years (since the time of Abraham) in the most **war-torn zone of the ancient world**. They had been enslaved by Egypt, embattled by the Philistines, invaded by Assyria, and, finally, almost obliterated by Babylon. And through it all, God had **somehow** managed to preserve them.

He had also managed to inspire them to **hold on** to their religious faith and keep the sacred scriptures safe and intact. God guided them through all their **trials** and even their **rebellions**, preparing them to be the people who would give the world its Savior.

But it is amazing for **another reason** too.

2500 years after **that** gathering in Jerusalem, here **we** are, **gathered** as God's People in his Church, **still listening** to the inspired Word of God. We are part of **that same story of salvation** that reaches back to the dawn of civilization.

This is the heritage given to us by Jesus Christ through our baptism. This defines who we are. It is an aspect of our Catholic faith that we often **overlook**.

But every year there are **thousands** of **non-Catholic** Christians who come into the Catholic Church **because** of it. Once someone who loves Christ **discovers** that Jesus himself **established** a Church, and that his Church traces its doctrine, sacraments, and traditions **directly back** to the time of Christ and his Apostles, and that this Catholic Church is the **direct descendent** of all the promises of salvation made by God from the beginning of the Old Testament, once they discover all of this, it **changes their lives**.

As Christians, we are **part** of the story of salvation **that reaches back 5000** years. We are the ones who have received the answers to the meaning of human life and human purpose which people have been seeking since God gave them the ability to ask the question, "Why am I here?"

And that means that each of us is also meant **to do something**, to **contribute** to the story. Our **vocation**, our **work**, the use we make of the **talents** we have received from God – **this** is how we can make our contribution. Usually this contribution is made through teaching our Children to receive this heritage, so they will pass the message of Salvation on to their Children. And the next generation will enjoy the benefits of knowing their worth as human beings and living their lives with purpose and meaning.

But the **quality** of that contribution depends on how **deeply** we have allowed **God's grace to make its mark upon us**. The more God's grace **saturates** our minds and hearts, the more we will **overflow** with his blessings, becoming **active, courageous** soldiers of Christ's light in this dark and confused culture.

In today's Gospel, Christ begins the proclamation of the Good News by identifying Himself with the promised Messiah in Isaiah's prophesy.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

We continue to live the power of that story of salvation when we live in accord with the heritage of Jesus' Mission. We cannot just speak about it we have to vote with our feet. We have to order our lives so that our actions show that we are indeed part of that great story of grace and redemption.

By accepting Christ's work of caring for the poor, forgiving our enemies, worshiping God and being a supporting member of His Holy people, we declare to our neighbors and our children our love for the Lord and our participation in that mission he has given us.

But more than that we declare that there is a purpose and a meaning in human living that unites us to the great history of grace and that there is a goal in human living that unites us to the great and loving God who desires us to be with Him in the joy and peace of His kingdom forever.