

Sunday 23 January 2022 – Epiphany 3

Today the scripture you heard has been fulfilled

Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a; Luke 4: 14-21

Today we meet Jesus in a synagogue, a Jewish house of prayer, reading the words of the Prophet Isaiah. It was a great day for the local community, and everybody has been there, eager to hear the local boy who's making such a name for himself.

Jesus enters the synagogue on that Sabbath morning. In the well-known house of prayer, he "unrolled the scroll" - it was a long scroll, read for centuries by every generation with the hope that God would finally in their lives fulfil the promise made by the prophets of the Old Testament.

"The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him" (Luke 4:20). There are no instructions on which section to read; the choice is up to him. Jesus is looking for a familiar text, and this text is located near the end of the scroll. In a strong voice, Jesus reads aloud words from the Prophet Isaiah.

The opening of the scroll by Jesus is the beginning of a dialogue between God and man. In Jesus, God begins a loving dialogue with all people, with each of us.

In this scroll, in which the prophecies of Isaiah are written, Jesus "found the place" where it was written about him. Jesus has found himself in the Book of Life.

Jesus says that everything He does is merely the fulfilment of the Father's promise through the prophets, and he is not doing his own work but has come to do the work of the Father. The way Jesus carries out God's Kingdom cannot be anything but obedience.

In the scroll in which the prophecies of Isaiah are written, Jesus has found words that spoke about his mission - to see the lost "from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7:9). Prophetic images draw our attention to the poor, enslaved and blind. The Gospel, the Good News, is addressed to everyone, but it is accepted by the "poor", the poor in spirit, by those who know the poverty of their sins well. For these humble people, tormented by their sins, the teaching about God's mercy, redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and hope for heaven is truly "good news".

These people accept the Gospel of God's grace and forgiveness with joy because they are sincerely thirsty for God's help in the sense of their weakness.

Saint Luke tells us that they were all marvelled at him and "were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" (Luke 4:22). Saint Luke speaks of the astonishment caused by Jesus' words, but he does not mention the faith of the inhabitants of Nazareth because there was not much of it.

The initial delight was quickly replaced by doubt. The people of Nazareth remembered that He is only the son of the carpenter Joseph, whom they know well.

Therefore, although Jesus' words, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), reached their ears, they did not penetrate their hearts; they did not bring joy. They remained only an empty sound.

Saint Luke, writing this passage, uses the Greek word "today" (*semeron*), which literally means "this (very) day."

This very day is the day of salvation. This very day scriptures are to be fulfilled in our hearing. This very day is the day of repentance and renewal. The lost are found and restored today. The poor must be fed today, and the thirsty must be given water today.

These words are coming true this very day. Our God is not just a God of memory, a God who has done great things in the past that we would like to remember. Nor is he the God we expect to come to in the indefinite future. Our God is a living God. Our God is Emanuel, God with us, as the prophets of old proclaimed. Our God comes to each of us this very day.

Philosopher Paul Tillich says that if we think of God as a supernatural being who is "out there," far away, unapproachable, then the only logical conclusion is atheism because such a God will not hear our prayers. Because such a God is not interested in our life, our joys and our worries. And if so, we don't need such a God either.

And yet, today, Jesus comes to our house of prayer, to our church, to St Peter's, to continue a loving dialogue with each of us. Jesus comes to himself, to a place close to him, as it was in Nazareth. He sits in our midst and says the words, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." I am with you this very day, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Amen.

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