

27th January 2019 (Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10; Psalm 18(19):8-10,15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4,4:14-21.

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!

As we start the period of Sundays in Ordinary Time, we are presented with Jesus who launches his ministry among the Jewish people. He goes to the synagogue where the locals meet for prayer, and stands up to read and reflect on the scriptures. The text Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah reflects the programme of his own mission.

Within a Jewish context, the fiftieth year is considered a jubilee year – a year of the Lord's favour or acceptance. Just as the seventh day in the week marks the sabbath, the day of the Lord, so also the fiftieth year, the year following a week of weeks (ie 49 years) is a holy year. The Lord's favour is celebrated by returning the land to its original owners and by setting slaves and prisoners free. During this year, fields are not farmed, and people eat what the land produces of its own accord. The jubilee year represents God's mercy and forgiveness to his people.

In the text from Isaiah Jesus proclaims, the prophet announces to his people in exile in Babylon that the Lord is going to remember them, be merciful to them and set them free from their exile. God has forgiven his people and is now showing them his favour and acceptance.

Jesus declares that 'today' this scripture is being fulfilled. Jesus takes on the role of the prophet and announces that God is still showing his favour and acceptance. Jesus declares that in him the Lord's promise is being fulfilled, he is the one called to show God's favour and acceptance to the people of God.

In the first instance, Jesus is addressing his listeners in his own hometown; they are the first subjects of this proclamation. In the gospel according to Luke, the expression 'today' has a much wider validity. As we listen to this gospel passage being proclaimed to us, we too become part of the synagogue in Nazareth and Jesus' declaration takes on a present tense for us too. The celebration of the life death and resurrection of Jesus does not end with the end of the gospel, but is still relevant for us. 'Today' as we listen to Jesus read out the passage from Isaiah, we too become part of the year of favour and acceptance of the Lord. This is the good news that Jesus has set out to announce.

As followers and believers in Jesus, we are invited to participate in the year of God's favour. God invites us into his favour and acceptance. God opens his arms of forgiveness and mercy towards us. As we read the reflection in the book of Genesis, we understand that like Adam and Eve, given the chance, we too often abandon God's invitation and disobey God's will. God has created us in freedom to be able to choose to love and respect him, but this also means that we are free to disobey and walk away from God's invitation and promise.

Jesus comes with a new promise, a new invitation; he comes to proclaim a year of jubilee of the Lord's favour and acceptance. Even in our sinfulness, God does not abandon us, but generously reaches out to us. God continuously invites us to participate with him in his love. In the past God did this through the words of his prophets; now he reaches out to us through his only Son become flesh like us.

As long as I live, Jesus will continue proclaiming: 'today' is the year of the Lord's favour. 'Today' God once again offers me his favour and acceptance. I am invited to stop and listen. The invitation is to turn back away from my sinfulness and once again start following in the Lord's footsteps. The Lord knows that I am weak and that many times each day I will again reject his call; but God is ever patient and never gives up. Each day, each moment, is a jubilee year; each day is a good time for me to turn back to that I can be set free from my captivity and my blindness.

Let us accept the Lord's favour and invitation

Fr Mario