

“Fulfilled in Your Hearing”

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The Gospel reading of this Sunday set an unusual procedure. It starts with the introductory note of the Gospel of Luke chapter one and jumps to chapter four. Why did the Church arrange the reading in such a way? One approach is to connect the historical Jesus to the mystery of salvation. Luke establishes the veracity and authenticity of his writings both in his introduction to the Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel of John similar thing takes place; however, John uses testimony or the verification as an eyewitness as an epilogue, like a signature at the end of a document. In both cases, the writers of the Gospel allude to the fulfilment of God’s Messianic promise of salvation in Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one.

Using a play analogy of the Bible, the first reading from the Book of Nehemiah can be imagined as the play leading to the intermission and the Gospel of Luke as the second part leading to the conclusion of the play. Both Ezra and Jesus are addressing an audience, eager to hear the Word and captivated by their articulation. The first reading says, *“Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.”* Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites together assured their audience saying, *“**Today** is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad and do not weep.”* The assembly gathered by Nehemiah to listen to the readings by Ezra the priest is assured of God’s active presence, keeping his promise of deliverance. After concluding reading a passage from the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus adds his own words, *“**Today** this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearings.”* In both readings, “Today” signify God’s active presence in the moment and in the assembly.

In both readings, we notice that the audience understood what was read. However, the response was different. In the first reading the audience absorbed and accepted what was proclaimed touching them emotionally, and spiritually. In the Gospel we read, “The eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.” Though assembly paid attention to the passage Jesus read, he was their village boy, who customarily attended the synagogue service. Most likely he was a lector that is why he “was handed a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah.” Like the English saying, “Familiarity leads to contempt,” he was too much for his fellow villagers to see him beyond being their homy. They were incredulous about the praises he gained teaching in the synagogues outside the Nazareth, his home village. Looking at him intently was that of puzzle and contempt not of praise and admiration.

This leads us to the second reading from the first letter of St. Paul to Corinthians the well-known analogy, “we are the body of Christ.” St. Paul’s effort is to unify the community that was suffering from factionalism. In the Gospel it was familiarity that led to contempt, on the other hand in the Corinthian community it was ignorance or lack of familiarity about each other. St. Paul tries to enlighten his audience saying, “As a body is one though it has many parts, all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.” It is understandable to have such cultural tensions in the first communities, breaking all sorts of cultural and tribal taboos to create a community of love, “the new Israel.” Unfortunately, we have not made much progress in recognizing that we are the body of Christ. In analogy of the body, our differences should be accepted to fulfill different functions for the good of the community. Both familiarity and ignorance could serve as resistance front for God’s grace to work in us and through us. In the beginning of a new year, what is our disposition? Accept or reject the year of favor fulfilled in our ears? Looking at our communities’ challenges, are we part of the problem or solution? After all if one part of the body suffers, the rest is in pain too.