

# **The Challenge of our Anointing**

January 25, 1998 - 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Nehemias 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 Luke 1:1-4,4:14-21

(The first part of this homily was not picked up on tape. Father Larry had spoken of the awe of the people hearing the law being read to them in the first reading. Then he mentioned that he had been teaching the call of Isaiah and Jeremiah the past week to the Freshmen at Prep, and went into Isaiah 6 which he is reading. Before we begin the penitential rite for the Mass at Bread of Life, the congregation turns to the tabernacle and spends time in praise and worship of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He makes reference to this at the end of the reading).

"In the year king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. Seraphims were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft. 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!' they cried one to the other. 'All the earth is filled with his glory!' At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'"

Here it is. The prophet comes into the presence of God and the angels, who see God through eternity, are on their faces. They cover their faces, they cover their feet and they cry out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts!" That's why when we began our Masses here we cry out with praising and worshiping of God. We spiritually fall on our faces to realize that we are in the presence of almighty God. Sometimes we can take that for granted. We can never take it for granted.

Father Frances Martin, who is a charismatic priest who speaks in Steubenville every year, said that a true authentic prayer life is when you know that you are standing in the presence of God, when you have that knowledge inside you. We should never leave our prayer time until we've had an encounter, and we know it, before the throne of God because of the awesomeness, the holiness of God. A good way to find out where your spiritual life is is to look at your past week in prayer. How many times have you experienced the throne room of God? How many times were you touched by God and you touched God? That you knew that you were in God's presence? How you and I know that we've touched God is that there is a sense of deep awe. Littleness. Humility. Insignificance between the awesomeness of God and us.

Now Ezra is there reading the law and they all feel this awe. All of us should start our prayer by coming in humility before God. And what does God do through Ezra and what does he do to the prophet Isaiah? Let's stay with Isaiah because we've already heard Ezra.

Verse 6: "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it. 'See,' he said, 'now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin is purged.' Then I heard a voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' 'Here I am,' I said, 'send me!'"

The ember is a fire and when the fire touches the person Isaiah, he is transformed. Now we go to the Gospel today, and we touch the second reading today because it talks about the oneness of the body. What makes the body one? The Spirit of God. We are one in the Spirit.

Now let's go to Luke, Chapter 4:16 which is our Gospel today. Here is Jesus, the God-man. He goes into the temple, stands up and starts reading the Book of Isaiah. Verse 17: When the book of Isaiah was handed him, he enrolled the scroll and found the passage in which it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Now Isaiah could say this 750 years earlier after he had been touched by the ember. Now Jesus who proclaims this prophecy can say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME!" After we have been touched by the all-holy God and we fall down in adoration, then God himself reaches out from heaven through his angels and fills us with his Holy Spirit and when the Spirit of God touches us and purges us then we need to do something. We just can't stand here and say, "I've got the Holy Spirit." You and I need to take the Spirit and when he says, "Whom shall I send?" we say, "Here I am, Lord, send me."

So all of us are commissioned to go forth because God says today to you, "Who shall go for me?" and you and I say, "Here I am, Lord. Send me!"

Now how should we be proclaiming? Let's look. Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore, he has anointed me." In Hebrew the anointed one means "Messiah." The same word in Greek is Christos, Christ. Here is the anointed one. I was going to have everyone come up today, and I was going to anoint everyone, but then I would be doing something redundant because everyone of you was anointed when you were baptized, and those who have been confirmed were re-anointed at confirmation with the oil of chrism. So everyone here has been anointed by God. You and I have been anointed as Jesus was anointed. If I have been anointed with the Spirit of God, it says, "He has sent ME!" He has sent YOU. to proclaim, to bring glad tidings to the poor.

Glad tidings. Now we are going to unite the Old (Nehemiah) and New Testament. That means you and I must be persons of joy. If I'm bringing the good news, I have to examine my life? Am I a person of optimism? Am I a person of joy? Do I wake up in the morning and say, "Good morning, Lord," or "Good God, it's morning." Am I a person who rejoices? Am I one who brings the glad tidings of the gospel? And remember it's always more good news than it's bad news. The good news that you are redeemed, Christ came to die to save you from your sins. I am a person who has been redeemed. Can't you tell? Can people tell by looking at us that we've been redeemed? Is there that grin on our faces that make people think we're a little weird? They ask, "Why do you have that grin on your face?" "Because I have been redeemed." Then they say, "Where did you get it?"

And you say, "Jesus. The Spirit of God, and you can have it too." Is my life one of rejoicing and glad tidings?

Now if we go to the Old Testament of Nehemiah. Ezra says, "Don't be sad. Don't weep." This day is holy, Sunday now, and rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength.

Just a little aside here. Have you ever been depressed? All of us have. Here is a key to come out of depression. Rejoicing in the Lord. Just begin praising God. Lord, I praise you that I can see. I thank you that I can hear. I thank you that I can eat today. I thank you, Lord, that I can walk. I thank you for having a roof over my head. I thank you that I have a family that cares about me. Just thank God for what you have, instead of thinking of that miserable thing that is pulling you down, and you will feel the strength of God within you. You will feel the glad tidings. You will feel the redemption of God because you are praising him and when you and I praise God we are lifted up. That's why rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength. So the first thing Jesus comes to do is to proclaim the glad tidings of God.

"To proclaim liberty to captives." This is a pet peeve of mine. Sometimes instead of setting people free, we put burdens on them. We hit them over the head with the law. Jesus came to set people free. Am I a person who is helping people be set free or am I putting bigger burdens upon them? In your family are you putting burdens on your husband or wife or your children or are you setting people free by your presence in their lives? At work, are you setting people free by your presence? Is someone more alive and free because of you? You and I have been anointed to set people free.

"Recovery of sight to the blind." Jesus meant this physically, yes. But he also meant it spiritually. If you read John's gospel, sin and blindness are always the same. Unbelievers and blindness. There are people in our lives who are unbelievers. Do we come to give them sight? Here is the gospel of life. St. Bonaventure said that the part of the Christian is to help people who think they are blind. Show them that they can see. Set faith within them. When the person has the vision of faith, they can see eternity. They can see God's purpose for their lives. They can see God's will. Proclaim this. So are we people of God with the Spirit of God in us that are helping people see? Are we talking about the faith? Are we bringing the faith in Jesus Christ to people's lives?

"Announce the year of favor from the Lord." I believe that God in our community and in our church has come to announce a year of favor. He says, "Today, this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your midst." I am here to tell you that today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in YOUR midst. (Applause). God is truly present here today. The same God who was there is the same God who is here, the same God that is inside you. If we cling to this, if we say, "Lord, you know that I haven't been doing what you called me to do, but change me." I grab on to this word and let it be fulfilled in me. Then it will. When we read the word of God it's not just a history book of 2000 years ago. It's what God wants to tell you today and now. It's living.

So to summarize. We need to be a people who know that God is God and we are not. We come into his presence with a sense of awe and worship. We need to give him permission

to send his Spirit upon us and we need to surrender to that Spirit so he can cleanse us. Then when the Spirit of God comes in us we need to be people that proclaim glad tidings, people of rejoicing, people who set people free, people who bring sight to the blind, and people who announce a year of favor, not a year of condemnation. (Applause).