

HOMILY for 3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about Jesus bringing healing to the blind and the suffering. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A doctor came to see a patient of his, Lucy, who was in the hospital recovering from major surgery to both hands. "Doctor," said Lucy excited, dramatically holding up her heavily bandaged hands. "Will I be able to play the piano when the bandages come off?"

"Well, the surgeon said everything went well," he said slowly, as he looked over the bandaging. "I don't see why not."

"That's funny," replied Lucy. "I was never able to play the piano before."

Anyway, this Sunday's Gospel tells us how Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath as one of His good habits. I don't know about you, but I used to wonder why we have to go to church on every Sunday besides Christmas, Easter, and the Holy Days. I was told that it is because we need to celebrate the Passion/Death and Resurrection of our Lord as often as possible. That way we would look forward to our own death & resurrection someday. But, this Sunday's Gospel gives us another reason why we should go to church on Sunday. It is because it was one of Jesus' good habits; & we would like to follow His example.

What did Jesus do in the synagogue? The Jews went to the synagogue/temple to offer sacrifices to their God to give thanks for something & also atone for their sins. However, they also got there to read the Torah/Bible. That is why Jesus unrolled the Scroll & found the passage from the Book of Prophet Isaiah. That is why the Church has designed the Mass with two parts: Part 1 is about reading Scriptures like the Jewish Tradition did; & Part 2 is about celebrating the Last Supper/Eucharist like the early Church did.

Another subtle detail in this Sunday's Gospel that we often overlook is the fact that the Holy Spirit guided Him to the passage: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind & release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." After reading that passage, Jesus said, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." All of that might sound like a coincident. But, I assure you that the Holy Spirit picked that Scripture passage & led Jesus to read it because He would be the one to fulfill it. That is why one of the penances I have sometimes asked penitents to do is to open the Bible randomly to a passage & start reading & reflecting on it. For I believe that the Holy Spirit knows what that penitent needs to think about the most at that moment. I have come up with that penance based on what happened between the Holy Spirit and Jesus in this Sunday's Gospel. So, next time we think that something happens by accident; we just need to look back on this Sunday's Gospel & remember that the Holy Spirit is always behind everything in this life.

As you might know, the people of God were driven into slavery by one empire after another. They were so desperate to have a Messiah & some good news. They wanted to be freed from their occupiers & return to their homeland. They needed lots of healing from the years of suffering & slavery. That is why Jesus was the perfect candidate that God had chosen to bring the people of God glad tidings & healing. That was exactly what Jesus did during His years of ministry. Even though the Scribes & Pharisees tried to set up controversies & kept pulling Him into all sorts of fights, Jesus did not let them make Him feel bitter & do a lot of angry stuffs. Instead, He preached lots of hopeful & caring messages like the Beatitudes & the

two Commandments of love. He felt sorry for a hungry crowd & did the miracle of multiplication of loaves & fish to feed them. He healed the sick & the suffering even on the Sabbath because He could not let them suffer one day longer. He opened the eyes of the blind & set tax collectors & prostitutes free from their old ways of life. He cleansed lepers from their hideous disease & brought them back to their community as the social outcast. For Jesus could see that each & every one of them has self-worth & a vital role to play in the grand plan of God. As far as Jesus was concerned, no one would be treated as the second class citizen because everyone has an intrinsic value. That is what we need to do to avoid all the condemnations and nasty messages happening in our society these days.

In fact, St. Paul reflects the hopeful & dignified spirit of Jesus in this Sunday's Second Reading as following: "The body is one & has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; & so it is with Christ. It was in one spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body... You then are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it." As you can see, Jesus does not discriminate a person based on one's ethnicity or social status. Everyone has an intrinsic value & is important member in the body of Christ. Unfortunately, we have seen the recent political movement in American society to consider certain ethnicities & social groups to be more valuable than others. We have some Christians who want to put America first & look down on the rest of the world or on people who do not fit nicely with their political viewpoints. I don't know how these Christians can look at Jesus and St. Paul in the eyes & reconcile their faulty thinking with the teaching in this Sunday's Second Reading. America first would mean that they basically tell countries/people that look like the toes and feet that they do not need them because they are not valuable compared to countries/people that appear like the beautiful blue eyes & the curly blond hair. I hope that they would change that erroneous mindset and try to conform it to Christ's if they want to enter His Kingdom someday. For I do not want Jesus to tell them "Heaven first" & keep them outside of the Gate of Heaven because they do not fit nicely with His political viewpoint. For Jesus wants to save every soul and invite everyone to be a part of His body. So, treat everyone as an important member of the body of Christ unless we want to be left outside of Heaven for eternity.

My dear brothers & sisters, we live in a world that loves to criticize and put down people with different political viewpoints. Worst yet, it wants to put certain groups of people first at the expense of the lowly & the social outcast. As I explained above, that is contrary to the vision of one body of Christ that Jesus & St. Paul would want us to live by. We need to avoid that faulty thinking if we want to belong to the body of Christ & enter His Kingdom after this life. Moreover, our world desperate needs a messenger like Jesus to bring it His glad tidings and healing acts at this time. Would you follow in Jesus' footsteps & be that messenger for our world?