

January 24, 2016 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

This week has been eventful, memorable and historic for lots of reasons. The week began with the national holiday honoring the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. as we continue to pray for the civil rights of all people and an end to discrimination and racial prejudice. We have also been observing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity throughout this week, concluding tomorrow on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, as we pray for unity within the Body of Christ that St. Paul reflected on so beautifully in today's Second Reading. And on Friday, we observed the 43rd anniversary of the devastating Supreme Court decision in 1973 which legalized abortion in our country. While the Annual March for Life took place in Washington, D.C., in spite of the predictions of the huge "winter storm of the century", in our diocese we celebrated Masses in each Deanery praying for an end to abortion, and, here in Kalamazoo, we had our own Ecumenical March for Life from the Cathedral to Bronson Park as more than 100 faithful people braved the winter elements to witness to our belief in the protection and defense of all human life. As is typically the case, not one major media outlet, to my knowledge, even made mention of the March held in Washington, nor the March we held here, since it was good news; however the media is always present to cover any event that they think can spark controversy or continue attempts to keep people upset and divided over national or local current affairs as we have experienced here all too often. And of course, over these last two days, we have witnessed the incredibly powerful and huge winter storm that did come as predicted and which has paralyzed the entire East Coast of our country with record-setting amounts of snow fall in more than 23 states. This is one of those times when we here in southwest Michigan can be glad that we are where we are as our hearts and prayers go out to the millions who are suffering from this historic storm.

Clearly, this has been a very full week---a week of prayer----a week of witnessing---a week of praying for new directions that are more consistent with God's directions for how we need to live our lives.

Today, as we celebrate the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, we listened to the very beginning of the Gospel of St. Luke, and the inaugural homily of Jesus

about the “new beginnings” of His public ministry. St. Luke tells us that after Jesus’ baptism, and following upon the 40 days He spent in prayer in the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee *“in the power of the Spirit”*, and after teaching with great success in a number of synagogues (where He *was praised by all*), Jesus *“came to Nazareth where He had grown up, and went according to His custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.”* When Jesus was asked to “preach”, He chose the passage for His inaugural sermon a section from Isaiah the Prophet: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”* Perhaps this Scripture verse was one of Jesus’ favorite passages; perhaps this is what He had been reflecting on during His 40-day retreat. But clearly, this is what was important to Him as He was preparing to begin His public ministry. And His “homily”? Well, He preached perhaps the shortest homily, or sermon, ever recorded. It had only 9 words, but 9 very powerful, and rather controversial, words: *“Today, this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”* The people in the synagogue sat in a kind of stunned silence because they understood what Jesus was saying, and the implication of those 9 words. What Jesus was telling them was that He was the one whom Isaiah was prophesying about; He was telling them that right there and then, in their very presence, on this very day, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled. Jesus wasn’t talking about a particular date; He was talking about a “new age”---a new time---a new testament. When he said “today”, He was referring to the fact that from now on, He would begin the mission to save the world from the darkness of sin, and to bring all the world new life and forgiveness of sins.

The day that Jesus preached His inaugural homily, and this day that brings us together to celebrate the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time on this cold and frigid late January day, are in a sense the *same day*---the same “time”---a part of the “new testament”, new age, a “new day”. Every time we come together for Mass and hear God’s saving and life-giving Word, we too are assured that God is with us to teach, guide, forgive and love us right here and now-----“today”.

In the Second Reading for our Mass, we heard St. Paul teach all the people of Corinth his masterful image of the Body of Christ. In hearing that same passage today, we realize anew how privileged we are to belong to, and to be a part of, the Body of Christ. All of us are different; each of us is unique and special; none of us is less important than anyone else. No matter what sins or failing; no matter

what challenges we are facing---we are each, equally, seen as precious in God's sight, and He comes to be with us in our own unique circumstances. All of us are united to one another and to Christ, the head of the Body. We know what happens when we mistreat any part of our own body----we get sick, and we feel bad all over. Similarly within the Body of Christ, which is why we need to pray so hard, and do everything we can, to end divisions within the Body of Christ----to end the legalized right to kill unborn babies in their mother's wombs----to end attacks against the practice of faith and to safeguard the freedom guaranteed to us, and all people, by the constitution of the United States----to pray that our elected leaders are faithful to protecting all citizens, including those who are unborn, those who are old and sick, those who are believers, atheists, or agnostics.

Our God is with us, here and now, in the "today" of the new life Jesus came to bring to the whole world. That is the Good News of Jesus that He brings to us today, in His Word, and in the Holy Eucharist for our spiritual nourishment on this "today", and all the "todays" still to come, of our lives.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley