

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2025 C

It had been a fairly full day, and I was looking forward to the easy chair. Driving home from the Advent Penance Service at St. Mary's, I turned left by the Courthouse and the headlights caught what I thought was someone lying on the sidewalk just down from post office. My first thought, he's moving, it's a busy street, someone else will stop. But then immediately, all I could think of was the Good Samaritan Gospel and the line "the priest passed by on the other side." Ouch! So I went around the block and came back. By then, a couple of young women in an Explorer had stopped and called for help already. I pulled up behind and talked to this older man, who had fallen on black ice. He was not hurt, but couldn't get traction to get to his feet. Granted, some beer was part of the backstory. But he was pleasant and grateful. The firefighters came just then, got him to his feet and home, only about a block away.

It was not much of a drama and I was far from a hero, but I tell that story because the Word of God was at work in that moment. Jesus' parable broke through to unsettle my comfortable plans and changed my course in a simple but real way that evening. On this Word of God Sunday, it's good to think about how the Scriptures have spoken to you in moments you might not have expected, and made a difference.

Something like this was happening with Ezra and the people of Israel who had returned from their exile in Babylon. During that exile, scrolls were lost, and the Torah, the Law of Moses, had become a fuzzy memory. The once-inspiring Covenant hopes linked to belonging to the Chosen People had gone dim through suffering and neglect. It's a little amusing to think of all those "men and women and children old enough to understand" standing around for 5 hours or more, listening to Ezra reading the Book of the Law. *Perhaps a few naps were taken.* But for most, ***it was the first time they had heard God's Word clearly in a long time***, and they were overwhelmed to learn of a path to rebuild their community: not just city walls and waterworks, but to become once more a people rooted in the God's Word spoken to them.

That long day in Jerusalem centuries ago invites us to listen to God's Word again *as if for the first time*, to listen not just to human words but to receive the very Word of God spoken to us. ***In honor of the Word today, think of your own favorite passage of Scripture*** – whether a Psalm or a parable of Jesus or maybe one of His miracles. And try to put the Gospel message into a single sentence. Among the dozens of books and hundreds of pages in the Bible, how would you explain simply, to someone who had never heard it, what God's Word is really all about? ***Love, redemption, healing, forgiveness, mercy – these are among the most used words in all those thousands of words in Scripture.***

But God does more than speak to us in words recorded on scrolls and held in memories. God makes that Word flesh. The perfect self-communication of God comes into our midst ***in Person*** in Jesus Christ. Ezra reading the Law of Moses, and Jesus reading the Prophet Isaiah, both conclude with the same assurance: ***Today is holy to the Lord Your God; Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing. Today:*** not just remembering past promises, not just hoping for future help, but the living PRESENCE of God TODAY. In the Eucharist, that Word of God is taken into ourselves, not only through hearing, but by consuming the Body of Christ: a single Word received in two ways.

Though we think of Catholic Schools this week, the education in faith and life that begins in those communities is meant to persevere all our lives. Seeds are planted, a foundation is built, lessons are learned and reinforced so that, in moments we might least expect, God's Word can speak through darkness, change our course, and help someone we don't even know to his feet. This week, look for at least three ways that, TODAY, the Scriptures will be fulfilled in our hearing.