

Closing Prayer

Lord God,
 whose compassion embraces all peoples,
 whose law is wisdom, freedom, and joy for the poor,
 fulfil in our midst your promise of favour,
 that we may receive the gospel of salvation with faith
 and, anointed by the Spirit, freely proclaim it.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God for ever and ever.

Collect for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C⁵

The Third Sunday of Epiphany

(Sunday between 21 & 27 January inclusive) • Ordinary Time, week 3

Principal Service readings

Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10 Ezra reads from the Book of the Law and the people listen
 Psalm 19 or 19.1-6 The Lord's commands are pure and trustworthy
 1 Corinthians 12.12-31a The church is made of many parts working together like a body
 Luke 4.14-21 Jesus begins his public ministry

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
 speak to our hearts in the stillness,
 keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
 lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
 and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.
¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.
¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
 and recovery of sight to the blind,
 to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Luke 4.14-21 NRSV¹

⁵ *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)*

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the

Comments and Questions

This week's gospel reading is what Luke has placed at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, after his baptism and testing in the desert. Why does Luke begin with this story? – Matthew and Mark place his visit to Nazareth much later in his ministry (Matthew 13.53-58; Mark 6.1-6).

The event recorded at the beginning of Jesus' ministry is an act of public worship. Jesus has gone into the synagogue at Nazareth to worship God on the sabbath day, as he had been brought up to do. The teaching and actions of Jesus arise from the context of Judaism – in this passage, Luke shows that Jesus is faithful to the synagogue, the scriptures, and the sabbath. Why would he want to emphasise this?

All male adults were permitted to take part in the synagogue services, as Jesus did, by reading scripture and commenting on it. The synagogue services were quite informal, they consisted mainly of prayers, scripture reading, comments, and giving alms for the poor. Led by the laity, the synagogue became the religious centre of Judaism during the exile, and remains today the dominant form of Judaism.

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61.1-2, announcing the fulfilment of this prophecy and also defining what his messianic role is.

The portion of scripture would have been familiar to those assembled, but Jesus makes it relevant to the present day and to himself.

'The year of the Lord's favour' (v.19), refers to the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year (after 7x7 years) was a radical initiative that directed that all ancestral land was to be returned to its original owners, in theory at least – see Leviticus 25.10-17.

Luke has already said that Jesus' ministry is driven by the Holy Spirit (v.14). Jesus quotes Isaiah – 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me' – and then makes clear that it is personal: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. Can you imagine the impact on his hearers?

Jesus believed the message of Isaiah and believed himself to be the Messiah sent to proclaim it. As disciples of Christ, to what extent do we believe and proclaim this message of hope and freedom?

Quotations

1

The reign of God, the reign of life, is the ultimate meaning of human history, but its presence starts now on the basis of Jesus' concern for

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

history's forgotten people. This is the testimony of the Lukan text, "today this scripture has been fulfilled" (v. 21). This is the time of integral liberation in Christ; in the person of Jesus, the kingdom becomes present. Now it is our turn as his followers to carry out fully our roles as prophets, teachers, authorities (1 Cor 12:27-30). The poverty of our people demands that we fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah and Luke.

Gustavo Gutiérrez 1928–²

2

There is but one law for all, namely, that law which governs all law, the law of our Creator, the law of humanity, justice, equity – the law of nature and of nations.

Edmund Burke 1729–97

3

How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution and injustice? There can be only one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation.

Leonardo Boff 1938– and Clodovis Boff³

4

the greater part of the world is still suffering from so much poverty that it is as if Christ Himself were crying out in these poor to beg the charity of the disciples. Do not let men, then, be scandalized because some countries with a majority of citizens who are counted as Christians have an abundance of wealth, whereas others are deprived of the necessities of life and are tormented with hunger, disease, and every kind of misery. The spirit of poverty and charity are the glory and witness of the Church of Christ.

Gaudium et Spes / Vatican II. Para. 88⁴

Related topics

For further study:

Christology; Spirit; Sacramentality; Discipleship; Word of God

² *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year* / Gustavo Gutiérrez. – New York : Orbis, 1997. – p.133.

³ *Introducing Liberation Theology* / Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff; translated from Portuguese by Paul Burns. – Maryknoll, New York : Orbis Books, 1986.

⁴ *Gaudium et Spes = On the Church in the Modern World* / Vatican Council II. – Pastoral Constitution, 7 December 1965.