

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 21, 2007

Nehemiah 8:2-4A, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Homily by: S. Benilda Desmond, O.P.

Today's Gospel begins with an astounding revelation. It indicates that this Gospel of Luke was written for the benefit of one person, Theophilus. A similar dedication appears at the beginning of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Thus we have over one fourth of the New Testament produced so that one person, Theophilus, would have certainty in his belief in Jesus. The mystery is that no one seems to know anything about Theophilus. He appears nowhere else in the Bible. The Greek name means "Lover of God." Some have thus come to believe that this beautiful Gospel of Luke was written for everyone who loves God.

The first reading from the book of Nehemiah captures a poignant moment at the time of the return of the people from captivity in Babylon. The people are gathered on the site of the Temple on Mount Zion and they weep as the priest Ezra reads the story of God's love for them and his promise of a holy covenant with them. Ezra tells them not to weep because their strength must be in rejoicing of the Lord.

A similar scene is enacted in the Gospel. Jesus has come to his home town, Nazareth and all the people are gathered around him in the synagogue. Jesus found a passage from the book of Isaiah and reads it to them. There are many passages in Isaiah about the Messiah coming in glory and triumph to bring the holy people dominion over their enemies but Jesus did not choose to read these. He read only of the Spirit coming upon the anointed one to empower him to bring the good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind and to set free the oppressed. He then sat down and with all eyes fixed on him. He announced, "This day the passage is fulfilled ..." It is the perfect introduction to this Gospel where Jesus is always responding to the needs of people. There is a certain sense in which we can say we are all poor, we are all captive, we are all blind, and Jesus came for us. This first story of the preaching of Jesus lays out for us the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Again and again in the pages that follow Jesus brings the riches of his word to the poor, the light of truth to the blind, and freedom from guilt to those held captive by sin. It all comes to culmination when he hangs upon the cross and declares to the man we have come to call "the good thief," "This day you shall be with me in paradise." Our strength will always be in rejoicing in the Lord and cherishing the memory of his love for us is to be our greatest joy.