

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time 2019

My dear brothers and sisters, before I ever preach, I always pray: “Lord, help me to preach this Gospel with enthusiasm and with joy, and open up the ears of my people to hear your Word and to rejoice in it!” Over the last few months, you have heard me say to you a number of times, that the Word of God, is not a dead word on a page, but the Living Word of God, that is being spoken to us **Now**, by the Lord Jesus Himself! Both the first reading and the Gospel, are truly amazing for this very reason: they proclaim to us that we are in the same story of Salvation by our God; we are still listening to the Living Word of God!

In the first reading, we are transported back into time to the year 450 BC. The people of Israel had returned to a despoiled Jerusalem after 70 years in exile in Babylon, current day, Iraq to find the beloved and Holy City completely destroyed. It had taken an entire generation of Israelites to rebuild the Temple of God and the city walls around Jerusalem. The city and the province were underneath the leadership and rule of Nehemiah, who was the Jewish adviser to the king of Persia: Cyrus. After rebuilding, to celebrate, Nehemiah and the prophet and priest Ezra proclaimed a special Liturgy in which all of the inhabitants of the region gathered at the newly rebuilt Temple for a public reading of the Ancient Law, the Torah, Nabiim and Dibriim, the whole of the Old Testament. This was an utterly amazing event!

First of all, because God's Chosen People, the Israelites, had survived as a such a tiny nation in one of the most war torn areas of the ancient world, for 1500 years since Abraham. They had been enslaved by the Egyptians, embattled by the Philistine, invaded and subjected by the Assyrians, and almost obliterated by the Babylonians; and yet, through it all, God had preserved them, and they had held onto their precious religious faith and had kept the remnant according to His Divine Covenant and Promises, because God is always faithful to His Covenant, even when we are un-faithful! He did all of this in preparation for His Messiah and our Savior!

What is also utterly amazing is that 2500 years later, here we are, gathered as God's Chosen People in His beleaguered Church, beset by infidelity and scandals-

yet here we are, because we are included into that same story of Salvation that reaches back to the dawn of civilization! God is always faithful to His promises! This is our amazing identity in the Messiah for whom Israel placed its Hope, and in whom we believe and place our Salvation! Jesus still says to us: “This day, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing....And not even the gates of hell will prevail against this Church!”, because God is always faithful to His promises!