

ORDINARY SUNDAY III “C”

JANUARY 23/24, 2010

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

In Church iconography, the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are each associated with the depictions of the vision of the four-winged creatures that appear in the biblical books of the prophet Ezekiel (Ez.1) and the Revelation (Rv.4). The winged-man represents St. Matthew, the winged-lion St. Mark, the eagle St. John and the winged-ox St. Luke.

An ox by nature generally is an animal possessed of a gentle disposition, yet very strong and capable of shouldering great burdens.

As St. Luke opens his account of the person and work of Jesus he gives us the scene in today’s gospel. Like the scene of today’s first reading from the Book of Nehemiah the people are gathered together on the Sabbath as the Word of God is proclaimed to them by Ezra similar to our experience in every Mass. In the gospel passage it is Jesus who is the reader. Luke tells us that Jesus opens the scroll to what we have labeled the 61st chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. There an unnamed “Servant of the Lord” is described as one upon whom “*The Spirit of the Lord*” has descended, who has been “*anointed*” by God to “*bring glad tidings to the poor; proclaim liberty to captives; recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free; to proclaim a year (season/time/day) acceptable to the Lord*” (Lk.4:18,19). Then Jesus rolls up the scroll, sits down in the traditional posture of a teacher and delivers his radical statement: “*Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Lk.4:21).

Jesus in his humanity, his person, his words and actions gives flesh and blood fulfillment to the centuries old promise of the Scriptures. This fulfilled promise is “good news” to all who find themselves heavily burdened in life. Jesus comes to take upon himself, and heal, the heavy burdens that weigh people down. St. Luke fleshes out

this fundamental portrait of the person and work of Jesus with scenes and parables unique to his gospel: the parables of the lost sheep, coin and “Prodigal Son”; the “Good Samaritan”; the Rich Man and Lazarus; the meeting with Zacchaeus; the redemption of the “Good Thief” traditionally named Dismas at the point of death upon the cross. As Jesus is the enfleshment of God in and for the world, he in turn called to himself (and continues to call) a community of believers upon whom God has also bestowed the same Holy Spirit that filled the humanity of Jesus. This is you and me. We, as St. Paul reminds us, are the body of Christ. Our mission as Christians is to participate in and continue the living story of Jesus by “writing a fifth Gospel” with our lives.

This weekend we act out our being and acting as the body of Christ in two concrete ways. First, in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick Jesus walks among us today, reaching out to those among us who are burdened by illness and through the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil assures them that God does not abandon us in our sufferings but is always here to console and heal us in the particular way we most need. Perhaps that healing is a total or partial physical one. Or perhaps it is a strengthening to face the on-going challenge of illness. It certainly is one of forgiveness and peace.

Secondly, in our special collection for our suffering sisters and brothers in Haiti, we demonstrate our solidarity as the body of Christ, head and members, which is renewed in each Mass. Our financial sacrifices will be forwarded by the archdiocese to Catholic Relief Services to assist them in their relief following the devastating earthquake. Through this collection we are the healing presence and hand of Jesus reaching out to our suffering brothers and sisters “raising them up” to renewed wholeness.

Today, the Scripture is fulfilled in our hearing. “Thanks be to God. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”