

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

I am working on a Jigsaw Puzzle that reproduces Vincent van Gogh's painting "Starry Night". After I had been working on it for a week or so I decided that it would be helpful if I found out a bit more about that painting. Knowing something of the background of the painting and the story of how it came to be, helped me to appreciate the work of art that I was putting together piece by piece.

The same can apply to the Scripture readings that are proclaimed for us each week. Today we begin to read from the Gospel of Luke. But those who have put together our lectionary have given us an opportunity to listen to the prologue of Luke's gospel and his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, before we move on to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in chapter four. This prologue gives us some background to the gospel and tells us that Luke is writing an ordered account of the things that have taken place among those who have come to believe in Jesus. The order in which Luke arranges his material is very important. He is drawing upon eyewitness accounts of what happened, upon what others have written, and upon his own research. And he is writing these two books so that those who read them "may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received."

It is with that background that we look at the moment when Jesus went into the synagogue at Nazareth and uses a passage from the Prophet Isaiah to proclaim his mission. This took place after his Baptism and his time of temptation in the desert. The Spirit was very much at work in those events. Luke tells us today "Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee."

Jesus had gone back to his home synagogue, to the place where, as a child, he had listened to God's Word proclaimed to him. The synagogue of Nazareth was the place where he had studied the Hebrew Scriptures as a teenager and a young adult. He was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, and he unrolled it until he found the place where Isaiah had described his own mission as God's servant. "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

Can you imagine the silence in the synagogue at that moment as people waited for what Jesus was going to say next? None could have expected him to make the claim that he did. The very words that he had read from the prophet Isaiah were being fulfilled in him. He was the Prophet that God had promised he would send. He was the one to whom the Spirit of God had been given.

Over the next three years of his life people would see how that Spirit would be at work in him. Those who were open would hear him give good news to the poor, see him unburden those who had been weighed down with sickness, and watch him give sight to the blind. Those who were open to him would come to know God's love through him.

This Jesus is still at work in our world today. Jesus uses so many different ways to reach out to us in love. Everybody who cares for us can be an instrument of the Lord's mercy. Everyone who overlooks our faults and weaknesses and forgives us for the wrong we have done shares with us the mercy and forgiveness of our God. And we know that that is what the Lord calls us to do for others. He knows that to forgive somebody is never easy. We can only do it when we breathe in the Lord's own Spirit of forgiveness. Before Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, he breathed out that spirit of forgiveness upon all who had plotted his death and brought it about. That was the Spirit that he revealed in the synagogue of Nazareth. That is the Spirit that he has shared with us at our Baptism and renews for us every time we come here to celebrate the Eucharist.

Through our Baptism we are all part of that body of Christ that Paul spoke about today. As we heard last week, we are all gifted with different gifts so that we can

serve in different ways. Paul tells us today, "Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it."

One of the things that we love about Ash Barty is the way that she acknowledges and thanks those who support her in her success as a tennis player. She reminds us that nobody can achieve their goals without the support of many others. The same is true for us as members of God's Church. We cannot be Church on our own. We cannot be Church without the support of many others.

May we take some time this week thinking and praying about the role that we play as part of this Body of Christ that we call Church. May we know that the Spirit of the Lord is with us as we play our part with others to continue his work.