

From the Good News from the tradition of Luke: 4:14-21

by Sister Maureen McDonnell, OP Sinsinawa Dominican

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone glorified him.

He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

*The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me
to bring the good news to the afflicted.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,
sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.*

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, "This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening."

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Jesus proclaims the kingdom/reign of God in word and deed. In the passage from Luke, he calls for a Jubilee year: freeing of slaves, forgiving of debts, returning property to its original owners. Jubilee is meant to bring wholeness and another kind of freedom also ... from grasping material possessions and pride and selfishness. Wealth is not meant to be an idol; instead, we are called to place our ultimate dependence on God.

*How can we open our ears and lives to the radical, challenging message of Jesus' call to
21st century Jubilee actions and great openness of heart?
How does this refer to justice for workers?*

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Who Jesus is, is often interpreted *in* a synagogue (in Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles). One strong identity of his is that of *teacher*. This underlines Jesus' continuity with God's promises from long ago. Another strong identity of his is that of *prophet* in the line of Elijah and Elisha. (cf. Isaiah 42:1-9). Jesus has been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor; in fact, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' attitude toward the economically and socially poor is referred to many times. "Poor" can be translated as "downtrodden, oppressed, afflicted, forgotten, neglected, captives, the blind, those broken by debts and imprisonment."

*Do we notice the poor right in front of us ... on the street, in the media? When/if we do,
how are we moved to bring "glad tidings" to them?*

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Although in the early part of Luke Chapter 4, we are told that the people were astonished by his gracious words and gave him their full approval, just a few verses later, we know the tide is turning against him. Why? Apparently Jesus' fellow townspeople took offense because Jesus was so broad in his statement, referring to Elijah and Elisha ministering to "foreigners."

In fact, soon we realize, as Jesus does, that he is being rejected by his own people in the place "where he had been brought up." Jesus refused to limit his words and deeds to his "own people." Rather, Jesus' mission was *limitless* ... he proclaimed liberty, mercy, salvation, God's unconditional grace for *all*. Those who considered themselves *chosen* could not claim any special treatment in Jesus' eyes. He let them know in no uncertain terms that they were not the only ones considered "God's poor" or "God's beloved."

In what sense is Jesus announcing a "new way" of being and treating each other ... a year acceptable to God ... where all are peers, deserving of love, respect, and justice?



Blessing Prayer

Suggested use: Two readers may alternate reading prayerfully the short paragraphs as indicated, with ALL praying the first and last lines.

ALL: For the gift of work, we are grateful ...

READER 1: As the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we follow in the steps of our first parents who, before their fall, worked joyfully with their hands in your Garden of Eden, Creator God.

READER 2: We are thankful for the dignity and creative challenge of our unique tasks. For the work that ennobles us, that lifts up our spirits, we are grateful. By means of these labors, we are able to give flesh to our spiritual dreams and to work out the salvation of Earth.

READER 1: We take time to thank you, God, for those common tasks that we must perform each day, those necessary labors of life by which, according to your Divine Plan, we are also to create the Kingdom here in our midst.

READER 2: We daily follow in the footsteps of Jesus, carpenter of Nazareth, and in the way of Mary, his Mother, who gracefully worked at the tasks of her home, as we rejoice in the opportunities for work that form us in your Love.

READER 1: With St. Paul, the tent-maker, with St. Peter, the fisherman, we too labor in love as we proclaim the mysteries of your Good News.

READER 2: Help us, O God, to use the work of this day – to perform it with mindfulness and attention, with care and devotion – that it will be holy and healing for us and for all the Earth.

ALL: Blessed are you, O God, who enhances our lives with work. Amen.

(adapted from Prayers for the Domestic Church by Rev. Edward M. Hays)

Leader can invite spontaneous prayers of praise/thanks/petition from all gathered, and then draw all to a close with a concluding prayer.

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For reflection, a reading from the Rev. Wayne “Chris” Hartmire
(*Founding Director, National Farm Worker Ministry*)

Gandhi, King, Chavez, Mother Teresa, the nameless saints. They are all irritants, challenging the careful, comfortable ways in which we have organized our lives. Yet we love them. Why do we love them? It is only partly because of who they are. They give flesh to what they believe and thereby awaken a spirit deep within us. By their words and deeds they call forth that part of us that yearns to give life, to love mercy and to do justice. By living their lives the way they do they reach for what is deepest and best in each of us – pulling, organizing, putting our love for justice to work in practical ways that serve the poor. We respect and love ourselves more as we put into practice what we believe in our hearts; and we love, with a universal love, those persons who led us on that better way.

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Reading from *Loaves and Fishes* by Dorothy Day (adapted) c. 1963

Listen to the words of Dorothy Day: Young people say, “What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?” They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

The greatest challenge of the day is how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us. When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our brothers and sisters with that burning love, that passion, which led to the Cross, then we can truly say, “Now I have begun.”

Resources: The Catholic Study Bible

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy

Our Prayers Rise Like Incense, Liturgies for Peace, ed. Cindy Pile, published by Pax Christi USA, 1998