

3rd Sunday through the year C. – Nikolaas Sintobin SJ

Neh. 8, 2-4a. 5-6. 8-10 Ps 19 1 Cor 12, 12-30 or 12-14.27 Lk 1, 1-4; 4, 14-21

It was 13 March 2013 in the evening. White smoke had come out of the Sistine Chapel. All the cameras were focused on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica for the presentation of the new Pope. He was to give his blessing for the first time. Then it happened. Instead of immediately giving the blessing, Pope Francis bowed to those present. For twenty long seconds he remained bowed, while the people prayed for God's blessing on the new pope. These twenty seconds in silence were the world's news the next day. It was clear. This was the beginning of something new.

Just now, in the Gospel reading, we heard Luke recount an experience similar to this. Jesus does not give a blessing. He reads from Isaiah. Those present feel that something special is happening. Something that is completely new. The following time will prove the listeners right. In those few verses, Jesus mentions the core of his message, of his mission, of his life. This is going to change everything.

I repeat the central part of the words that Jesus reads out. You can divide them into three parts. The Spirit of the Lord ... has sent me (1) to bring the Good News to the poor, (2) to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, (3) to proclaim a year of grace from the Lord. For us, listeners of Jesus, each of these three parts is both an announcement, an experience and a commission.

1. Jesus says that He is sent to bring the Good News to the poor. Jesus defines us as poor, as people who experience lack. He also says that his message, his life, his person is the answer to that lack.

- ⇒ Can we capture this message, here, today? Am I ready to consider myself poor? What does that mean for me in concrete terms?
- ⇒ Do I believe that Jesus is the answer to these questions? Have I already experienced this?

2. Then Jesus mentions three sources of unfreedom and powerlessness from which He wants to free us: free the imprisoned and the oppressed and make the blind see?

- ⇒ Jesus promises us freedom. Growing in freedom means that I will be less and less lost in the side roads that prevent me from living fully. That I dare to entrust myself more and more to the path that God himself shows me.
- ⇒ What do I cling to? Do I really turn to Jesus to be set free? Have I experienced anything like this recently? To what liberty does Jesus invite me?

3. Finally, Jesus promises us that He wants to share God's grace with us. He wants and will give us the strength and inspiration to grow into beautiful people, in the image of God himself.

- ⇒ Where do I need God's grace now: his strength, energy and guidance?

⇒ Do I ask Jesus for that grace when I feel I need it? Do I accept that grace, even if it sometimes points in a different direction than I had hoped?

Jesus is new. With Him everything becomes different. This was so in the synagogue of Nazareth, 2000 years ago. It is so today. We have the freedom, and thus the choice, to accept his extended hand.