

### 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time "Fulfilled in our Hearing"

Fr. Frank Schuster

I loved theater as a child. I did my best to be involved in as many plays and musicals as I could. From Arsenic and Old Lace to the Heartless Troll, from the Japanese gardens of the Mikado to the high school courtyards of Grease, I enjoyed being onstage as a kid. I enjoyed being on stage so much that I put up with all the pain and suffering of preparing for the opening night, with the countless rehearsals, the memorization of lines, and the inevitable soap operas that erupt from time to time between cast members. I used to wake up in the middle of the night from nightmares of being on stage unable to remember my lines. This is the most horrible fear of any actor or actress. And then, the day comes. All the work and all the anguish come into focus. You walk to your spot with butterflies in your stomach, the lights go down and the curtain opens. The lights go up, an ocean of people and your cue is given. If everyone does their part, sometime during that night or on another night, a sort of miracle occurs. You can find yourself not just reciting lines anymore. Chemistry has developed between the actors and the timing becomes perfect, like an impossibly difficult dance being performed flawlessly, almost unconsciously. The story becomes fulfilled in the moment.

Athletes probably know what I am talking about. If I were to go out this door and try to run a marathon, my destination would be Evergreen Hospital. It takes months, even years of training to prepare well for a marathon. For most athletes, being prepared for your sport means day after day of exercising, running, lifting weights, eating right, everything I don't like doing. And then something happens, I'm told, the athlete almost doesn't have to think much about what they are doing, they become one with the sport. I think of athletes of old like Michael Jordon and Joe Montana who were so amazing, it was like you were watching artists. The art and the artist become one and it is a moment when everything they have worked for comes to fulfillment.

In our first reading from Nehemiah, we have this beautiful reading about Ezra the priest lifting high the scroll containing the law and processing it to the wooden platform. Ezra read the law, loud and clear, from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. His commentary on the Law of God must have been quite severe because afterwards, Nehemiah needed to encourage the people to not be sad. He had hoped that they would celebrate. The Law of Moses however can have that effect on you. Who can follow all of it? We all are condemned by it, argued St. Paul to the Romans. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel waits for the coming of the Messiah, the savior, the fulfiller of the law. And the Law of

Moses, the words of the patriarchs and prophets, and the rituals that developed over time, helped the Chosen People prepare for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus selected a specific passage that prophesized the coming of the messiah. Jesus read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Once he rolled up the scroll, much like how Ezra rolled up the scroll many years before. Jesus looked square into the eyes of everyone in the synagogue and told them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". The scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Everything that was written down in the Pentateuch, everything that was written down by the prophets, everything that has been handed down throughout the centuries, pining for coming of the Messiah, all of it is fulfilled in that moment in Jesus Christ.

What was the response? Well we will learn from the Gospel reading next week, that the response wasn't so good. In fact, they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. Clearly, it is one thing to prepare for Christ's coming, and it is quite another thing to be ready for Christ's coming. I can feel like I rehearsed and rehearsed for opening night and then discover horrifically that I wasn't ready when the spotlight turns on. The result, the story does not become fulfilled in the moment. The people in that synagogue had rehearsed their whole lives for the coming of Christ. When Christ appeared, they were not prepared.

And that is the question the Gospel is posing to us today. You see, all of us in one form or another prepare through life for Christ's appearance. We say our prayers, we go to church, and we rehearse our roles as Christians in society. Sometimes we are ready when the curtain opens on a particularly difficult situation at home, work or school and our identity as Christians is fulfilled in the moment. Sometimes the curtain opens on particularly difficult moments of life and we are not ready, we forget our lines, or worse, step into the wrong role altogether.

To prepare ourselves for these moments, the Lord has given us his Gospel. We are challenged this weekend to consider the question: Are we open to the word of God becoming fulfilled in our hearts, one with our being? Are the scripture readings, the songs we sing, and the prayers we utter, are they just print on the page or are they convictions of the heart? Are we half way Christian or fully Christian? There are many parts to the Body of Christ. Every one of us brings to the team our unique gifts. Jesus Christ is the mind and heart of this Body, the Church. If the hands or feet don't do what the mind tells it to do, you have a body that stumbles and trips over itself. The challenge

of the Gospel, and St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, is to allow Jesus' words to be fulfilled in our hearing.

And so we can ask ourselves, are we only a disciple one hour a week or are we a disciple every day, every hour and every minute of the week? Are our lives in harmony with the word of God, or is there something out of key? Priests and bishops must ask that question. Family members must ask that question. We all have to answer this question: are the words we read in scripture just print on a page or are they fulfilled in our hearing? Only then can our faith in Christ be fulfilled in our doing.