

Third Sunday Ordinary Time      *Today is holy to our God.*  
January 26-27, 2013/ 400p, 900a SVdP; 12:00 Noon; 5:00 p.m.  
Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4;4:14-21

The readings today are for the third Sunday of the Church year, yet we also remember our patronal feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul in a special way on this weekend, closest to the January 25 Feast. Ezra had gathered the whole community to listen to the reading of the Torah, the Law of ancient Israel. It is he who is responsible for giving an official interpretation of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, but always in the spirit of Moses. This marks the beginning of Oral interpretation of the Law in Israel.

It stands to each generation to assimilate, interpret and make present and understandable the sacred truths of our faith. In the time of Ezra, the Torah was translated into a more common language of Aramaic, complete with authentic explanations and fresh insights. The leaders tried to apply the ancient law in fidelity to new circumstances, including creative stories used by way of illustration.

Ezra was the man chiefly responsible for restoring the religious life of the people in Jerusalem and Judah. One of his first acts was to get the people to renew the covenant made seven centuries earlier and to dedicate themselves to his service. The people needed to realize that all their future hopes depended on God alone.

There are parallels to our faith today because we stand as inheritors of a rich tradition of faith in this parish, founded in 1840. We must speak the saving truth of Christ to each new generation, while respecting the good work and faith of all who have gone before us in faith. Two and a half millennia after these events described, we are called to embrace the call to enter into a truly spiritual life, to find our home that the Lord has prepared for us.

The events held in front of the Cathedral this weekend serve as a great example of trying to be present to people in the moment, to meet them where they are, and to evangelize using all modern means of communication. Yes, there have been some inconveniences due to the Crashed Ice Event. But there have also been many opportunities.

I saw first hand literally hundreds and hundreds of people walking into this Church (sure, they were trying to get warm!), many of whom had never before set foot in this Church. I saw them gazing up at the dome, I saw them sitting quietly in the pews. I witnessed them venerate the relic from the tomb of St. Paul in Rome, and witnessed dozens and dozens of candles being lit. In all this, with the able assistance of our Cathedral Young Adults and Confirmation students, we met people, welcomed them and invited them to take "two minute tours," brief explanations of our magnificent Cathedral. And I need not tell you how beautiful our Cathedral looked all lit up for 115,000 to see.

This was an opportunity to evangelize. While we did not ask for the event to take place here, note were we a co-sponsor, we participated. In fact, 85% of the course is on public land owned by the city. By allowing our small portion of the Cathedral land to be used, and by opening our doors to all, it gave us an opportunity to speak to many people who would not otherwise have been here. That is a fact, and we tried to respond in a loving and inviting manner.

The return of the Jews from exile in Babylon was part of God's remote plan to provide a Savior to the people. Who knows what might have happened in the hearts of those who passed through these doors? Could this have been part of a plan to bring them into the Church? The beauty of this building "spoke" to them, opening up the possibility that God will speak to their hearts as well.

“Do not be sad, and do not weep.” Ezra is a sign of hope in the midst of turmoil. The people knew that the Law had not been kept faithfully. So, yes there needed to be repentance, but at the end of the day there must also be hope in the future. This is also our call today...to be people of hope and joy, and to let that shine through in our interactions, and yes, even in our ability to have a little fun on a cold Saturday evening.

As a parish, we stand tall and proud under the patronage of Saint Paul, and we gather to thank the Lord today for his gracious beneficence through more than 171 years. Our Catechism teaches:

This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, ‘the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.’<sup>1</sup>

We must hold fast to the belief that God who has begun the good work in this parish, will by his grace bring it to fulfillment and completion according to the designs of His will. We must never question the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church, either universally or more locally. The Spirit has blessed and will continue to bless us. Today is holy to the Lord. Let us rejoice in His manifold blessings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 78, referencing Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* 8 § 1