

Sunday, January 24, 2016

Belief Marked by Ritual

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011716.cfm>

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

1 Corinthians 12:12-30 or 12:12-14, 27

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

The online [Oxford Dictionaries](#) defines ritual as “a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order.” [Merriam-Webster](#) broadens the definition even more to “a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place and performed according to a set sequence.”

So why are we looking at that particular word in early January? When we hear that word ritual, church pops automatically into mind. Religious stuff! But this past week we Americans saw two rituals in the secular

media. The [State of the Union address](#) is definitely ritualistic! You may have missed the second event. It was the announcement of the nominees for this year’s [Academy Awards](#).

In the State of the Union address, every move can be predicted, from the initial announcement of the Speaker of the House—“the President of the United States”—through the speech itself with applause and standing ovations to the final sound of the Speaker’s gavel as the president leaves. This is an important event. Nothing is left to chance. It is ritualized.

The second instance, the announcement for potential Academy Award winners, though not as momentous, was equally ritualistic. The order of the categories as well as the alternation of the male and female announcers mimicked the real event. It, too, was ritualized.

So why are rituals used? When we experience them, they seem to be used to emphasize and house events that are of great or significant importance!

Today’s first reading and Gospel are both wrapped in ritual thus emphasizing their significance. The chosen people are returning home from a generation of living in foreign slavery. This solemn ritual was meant to remind them of who they are, who their God is, and that they have a solemn covenant with God. They are bound to God through God’s sacred law! They needed to hear the words of the law with the greatest solemnity! It will form them again as God’s chosen people.



As Jesus reads from the Isaian scroll, the ritual seems lighter than the reading of the law by Ezra, the priest. But is it? Not much ritual here, but great significance! Jesus, himself, chose the passage. It is the culmination of a much longer process than unrolling a scroll and searching for particular words. Luke places this event at the beginning of his good news! Chronologically, Jesus has been baptized and confirmed with the words from his God and Father, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

What a powerful, transcendent event for him! He takes forty days to digest that message and what it may mean for him and his future. That desert time was a time for Jesus to chew on and integrate those words into his very being. Jesus moves from his desert transition time with a firm step. He walks back to his starting point ... the synagogue in his home town in Galilee. He knows he is chosen as the beloved Son. What that means is clearly outlined by the prophet Isaiah. He is to “bring glad tidings to the poor ... liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” He is “to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” This is his mission. It is of the utmost significance and is thus wrapped in the ritual of the synagogue. Jesus’ mission is clear. He proclaims it in a public ritual!

All of us as Christians are disciples of Jesus. To come to the Father, we go through Jesus, being his flesh and blood on this earth now. Can we imitate this series of powerful events in his life? At our baptism each of us was chosen as a beloved son or daughter of God. And God is well pleased with us. As we live our lives, we learn in our desert experiences what that means for us. That knowledge comes to us little by little as we chew on it and integrate it into our lives. We hear God whisper in our hearts, “bring good news” to your down-and-out friend who is having problems, financial, marital, or personal. Tell him you care and are there to help. Assist your addicted relative to break through her captivity. Again, say that you care and are there to help, no matter how often she falls. Spend time with someone who is struggling with his path in life. Let him talk it through with you, hopefully to see the way. Every time we say, “I’m here for you,” we are publicly proclaiming that we are disciples of Jesus. We are choosing to walk his way.

These are significant decisions and ways of acting. Do we have a ritual to enwrap them? Actually, if we think about it, every weekend liturgy does that. When we proclaim our beliefs in the creed, we are saying that we choose to walk the path of a disciple of Jesus. We are not only beloved of the Father, but are filled with the Spirit and walk in the footsteps of Jesus according to our beliefs expressed through his church.

May we grow in awareness of who we are and what it means to be the beloved of the Father. May we have the courage that Jesus had and proclaim it in our lives! May we endorse the significance of this by a heartfelt proclamation of our creed, our belief.

Patricia DeGroot, Ob/IB

NOTICES

YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The Year of Consecrated Life that began on November 30, 2014, will close on the World Day of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2016. The USCCB has resources prepared for parishes, available at www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/consecrated-life/year-of-consecrated-life/. Logos, printed materials, and other resources for the Year of Consecrated Life are also available from the National Religious Vocation Conference at

<https://nrvc.net/275/publication/year-of-consecrated-life-2841>.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

Catholic Schools Week is celebrated in the United States January 31–February 6, 2016. Many parish communities hold special events in honor of Catholic Schools. For more information and for resources and ideas, visit: <http://www.ncea.org/our-services/catholic-schools-week>.

COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Church in Latin America the weekend of January 23–24. More information and collection resources are available at: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/latin-america/collection/index.cfm>. LPi customers can also find the resources on Art & Media Portal by searching keyword “[Church in Latin America](#)”.

PRAYER

O God, throughout the ages

you have called women and men to pursue lives of perfect charity

through the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

During this Year of Consecrated Life, we give you thanks

for these courageous witnesses of Faith and models of inspiration.

Their pursuit of holy lives teaches us

to make a more perfect offering of ourselves to you.

Continue to enrich your Church by calling forth sons and daughters who,

having found the pearl of great price,

treasure the Kingdom of Heaven above all things.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

—*Prayer for the Year of Consecrated Life* © 2014, USCCB.

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