

## FIRST READING – C 03

A reading from the book of the prophet Nehemiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The priest Ezra brought the Law before the assembly,  
both men and women and all who could hear with understanding.

This was on the first day of the seventh month.

He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate  
from early morning until midday,  
in the presence of the men and the women  
and those who could understand;  
and the ears of all the people were attentive  
to the book of the Law.

Nehemiah = NEE- huh-MIGH-uh

Ezra = EZ-ruh

Levites = LEE-vights

The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform  
that had been made for the purpose.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people,  
for he was standing above all the people;  
and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God,  
and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands.

Then they bowed their heads  
and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

So the Levites read from the book,  
from the Law of God, with interpretation.

They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe,  
and the Levites who taught the people  
said to all the people,

“This day is holy to the Lord your God;  
do not mourn or weep.”

For all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law.

Then Ezra said to them,

“Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine  
and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared,  
for this day is holy to our Lord;  
and do not be grieved,  
for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Just as the body is one and has many members,  
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,  
so it is with Christ.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body

– Jews or Greeks, slaves or free –

and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

Now you are the body of Christ

and individually members of it.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – C 03

The Lord be with you.

*And also with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then Jesus began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

The reason for the choice of this passage today is not clear. Probably a parallel is intended between Ezra's reading of the law and Jesus' reading of the prophecy of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue (see the Gospel).

There is no reason to dispute the historicity of this narrative, but there has been much discussion among scholars about the identity of the book of the law. Wellhausen propounded the attractive theory that it was the completed Pentateuch brought back from Babylon. Internal evidence, however, indicates that the prescriptions for the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles follow D, not P.

This passage offers a model of synagogue worship: the reading of the Torah, with the people standing, and the "giving of the sense" of it (that is, its exposition) so that the people will understand clearly; and finally the response of worship.

A similar liturgical order may be glimpsed in the synagogue at Nazareth and survives today in the Christian liturgy of the word, including the standing at the reading of the gospel, as the Jews stood for the reading of the Torah.

### Responsorial Psalm: 19:8, 9, 10, 15

The first three stanzas of the responsorial psalm praise God for the perfection (first stanza), truth (second stanza), and purity (third stanza) of the Torah, while the fourth stanza contains the fine prayer that God's law may be the subject of our constant meditation, so that both our thoughts and our words may be acceptable in his sight.

It should be remembered that "law" (Torah) had a wider meaning than commandments, precepts, and ordinances, though of course it included these. This wider meaning embraced the whole range of God's revelation.

For the Christian, the word or law of God is even more extensive. It embraces the revelation of the Word-made-flesh.

Note that the refrain from John 6:68b refers to the teachings of Jesus, specifically to his discourse on the bread of life. Hence the psalm is not only a response to God's self-revelation in the law as proclaimed by Ezra, but also a response to Jesus' sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, which will be read in the gospel.

### Reading II: 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27 (short form)

There has been much discussion among exegetes and biblical theologians over the sense of the Pauline image for the Church, the "body of Christ." Is it a metaphor, a simile, or an ontological reality?

In this passage—briefly in the short form, at length in the long form—the term clearly stands for simile and for ontological reality.

Paul starts with the simile: “Just as the body . . . so . . . .” But then one would expect him to say, “so it is with the Christian community.” No wonder Calvin was surprised at this apparent equation of Christ and the Church. But Paul is probably expressing himself a bit loosely.

What he really means by it is: As is the case with the human body, so it is with the body of Christ. This clearly shows that for Paul the body of Christ, though a simile, is more than that. It is an ontological reality.

The point is clinched in verse 27, after the exposition of the simile: “you are the body of Christ,” not “you as a community are like a body.”

So Paul uses “body” in an ecclesial context both as an ontological reality and as a simile. Why does he do this?

The answer lies in the probability that Paul did not himself coin the term “body of Christ,” nor did he receive it from pre-Pauline tradition (in the New Testament it occurs only in the Pauline literature). Where, then, did he get it?

Probably from the Corinthian Gnostics, who used it to express the solidarity between Christ and the baptized, as pre-Christian gnosis may have used the concept to express the solidarity between the Gnostic revealer-redeemer and the redeemed.

For the Corinthians, “body of Christ” expressed a substantial identity between Christ and the believers. They shared a common pneuma-substance.

Paul accepts the truth behind this insight but tones it down. To affirm the ontological identity between Christ and the believers without qualification is to overlook the Christological distinction between Christ and the believers. He is risen but the believers are not yet risen. Therefore, their salvation is not an assured possession. They have to work at it through obedience to the Kyrios.

Paul’s corrected use of “body of Christ” means just this. To be the body of Christ means to be dependent upon Christ and subject to his lordship. Hence Paul picks up the Stoic comparison of human communities to a body, in which each member has its function to fulfill and in which each function is indispensable (vv. 14-26). Paul thus emphasizes the ethical implications of the term “body.”

We may say, then, that for Paul, as for the Corinthian Gnostics, the term “body of Christ” was an ontological reality. But whereas for the Corinthians this ontological reality was a substantial one (of identity of substance, a pneuma-reality), for Paul it was a reality denoting Christological dependence: the lives of the believers shared a common deter-

mination by the saving act of God in Christ and were under the lordship of Christ. Consequently, they had to exhibit what they were in ethical obedience.

It is significant that when Paul was not in dialogue with the Corinthians, and therefore not restricted to use their term, he substitutes the more satisfactory expression “one body in Christ” (Romans 12:5), which plays down the aspect of identity and conveys a stronger suggestion of sharing a common dependence on the Christ-event.

The long form of this reading goes on to elaborate the simile of the body. Like a human body, the Church has members, each with its special function:

apostles  
prophets  
teachers  
-----  
miracles  
healings  
helps  
administrations  
tongues

We confine ourselves to three observations about this list. First, it is the clearest evidence we have about the shape of ministry in Corinth and probably in the other Pauline communities, too. It was charismatic, not institutional.

Second, in this setup apostles, prophets, and teachers were preeminent. They alone are enumerated (first, second, third). They are designated by personal titles, whereas the others are designated impersonally as gifts, a fact obscured in the RSV translation.

Third, this ministerial setup is not prescriptive for all time. Later the free charismatic ministries developed into ordained institutionalized ministries.

But one element remained permanent—the element of apostolic control. Paul exercised this control in the very act of writing 1 Corinthians, and with the canon of the New Testament a similar control was exercised by the episcopate in the second century.

### **Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

Luke 1:1-4 is the preface to the two-volume work of Luke-Acts. It is curious to place this preface immediately before the sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. Only here in the synoptic Gospels does an evangelist address the reader in his own name.

The preface discloses a number of significant things about Luke’s work as an evangelist. He is not the first in the field; “many” have written before him. This probably should not be pressed too much—all Luke is saying is that he has predecessors.

We know that Mark, the author of the Q material, and the author or authors of the special Lucan material preceded him. Luke understands his work as a “narrative” rather than a gospel (contrast Mark 1:1), that is, it is intended as a historical work, a description of the beginnings of Christianity.

It is commonplace nowadays to say that the Gospels are not biographies. But this is only partly true of Luke, for his Gospel aims at being a *vita Jesu* rather than a proclamation of the Christ-event, as Mark’s is.

“The things which have been accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1) will include not only the life of Jesus but also the history of the early Church, which is covered in the Acts of the Apostles. “Us” means the Christian community from its inception.

The Jesus tradition and the traditions about the early history of the Church have been handed down from eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, that is, the apostles and evangelists.

Luke does not include himself among the eyewitnesses; he is a member of the second or perhaps even the third generation, dependent upon secondhand or thirdhand traditions for both the life of Jesus and the history of the early Church.

Luke’s work rests upon his researches, not upon immediate inspiration: “having followed all things closely for some time past.” His account is intended to be orderly (“to write an orderly account”), a criticism perhaps of the work of some of his predecessors. As we see from his actual work, however, his idea of being orderly is to follow one source at a time.

His work is addressed to an individual, Theophilus, and is not designed, like the other synoptic Gospels, for liturgical use in a community. Its purpose is the instruction of catechumens.

The second paragraph of our reading (Luke 4:14-15) is an editorial link with the temptation story (note the phrase in brackets inserted in the Lectionary: “After forty days in the wilderness”). The wording is based on Mark 1:14-15, but with two significant alterations.

Luke emphasizes that Jesus’ ongoing ministry was performed “in the power of the Spirit”—an idea taken up by the citation of Isaiah 61 in the sermon at Nazareth. Luke wants us to bear in mind that the whole of Jesus’ ministry was inspired by the Spirit.

Second, Luke suppresses Mark’s summary of Jesus’ eschatological preaching (Mark 1:15) and substitutes the statement that Jesus taught in the synagogues. This prepares for the next scene, too.

Luke has shifted the sermon in the synagogue from its later position in Mark (Mark 6:1-6) to the beginning of the ministry. He has done so for programmatic reasons.

In the synagogue of his hometown, Jesus lays his cards on the table and interprets his role as that of the Isaianic servant. The servant's work will consist of preaching, the deliverance of the oppressed, and the performance of healings.

All this has an eschatological significance: it is the fulfillment of Scripture. It is not certain whether Luke himself composed this material, which is absent from Mark, or whether it came from his special source. Probably the latter.

Reginald H. Fuller