

Homily: “The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me.”

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-3; Luke 4:16-22a

Thursday, June 30, 2023 IHM Chapter

Today's gospel passage from Luke

portrays Jesus stepping out into his mission.

Here is Jesus proclaiming his program **as God in our flesh**,
telling us why he came to earth:

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for [the Lord] has anointed me;
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release for prisoners and sight for the blind,
to send the downtrodden away relieved”*** (Lk 4:18).

It is a summary way of stating a program we call biblical justice.

Matthew had already grasped this,

for he applied to Jesus the prophecy in Isaiah:

***“I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles...
He will **not break** a bruised reed **or quench** a smoldering wick
until he brings justice to victory”*** (Mt 12:18-20; see Isa 42:1-4).

Not **simply** or **primarily** the justice we **normally advocate**:

“Give each man, woman, and child what each deserves.”

God's justice includes that but goes beyond it.

God's justice is a wondrous word: **fidelity**.

Fidelity to what?

To **relationships**, to **responsibilities**!

What relationships, what responsibilities?

To God, to people, to the earth...

Sometimes the word **“righteousness”** is used

to **communicate** the idea of **biblical justice**,

but this is not a word most people prefer to use.

It strikes us as **archaic** or at least a **bit formal** and **stodgy**.

When we say, “Oh, you are so righteous”

we are not offering a compliment!

So, let's stay for a moment with fidelity.

Our **just God** is a **God of fidelity**.

The just man or woman is a **person of fidelity**.

The just heart is the faithful heart,

**the heart that aligns itself with the will of God,
the heart that looks to God.**

What **concrete demands** does **God's justice** lay on us?

- **Love God above all else**, with all your heart and soul, all your mind and strength.
- **Love each human being like another self**, as an image of God,
- **Love each as Jesus loves you**, especially those who are less fortunate, who share more of Jesus' sufferings than of his resurrection.
- **Touch every facet of God's creation with reverence** as a gift of God, mindful that we **are not despots but stewards** of what belongs to someone else.

A Redemptorist Brother whom I lived with years ago related an incident that happened to him while working in one of our parishes in Baltimore.

His ministry was with the elderly.

Every day, just before noon, he would walk down to the senior center.

On the way, he would stop at Anna's house, an elderly woman, and accompany her to the center.

It got to be a regular thing.

Anna always expected him and would call Brother Henrique if she was not able to go on a particular day.

One day, Henrique stopped at Anna's house and **got no answer**.

Anna had not called to say that she would miss that day.

Bro. Henrique kept knocking at her door and calling her name.

Eventually, he heard a groaning from the other side of the door.

Anna had fallen and hurt herself and was unable to get up.

He called an ambulance, got into the house, and brought her to the hospital.

On the way, Henrique held her hand and tried to calm Anna.

He kept saying to her, "Don't worry, God is with you,"

Finally, **during a moment of silence,**

Anna looked up at Bro. Henrique and said:

“Brother Henrique, **you are my God,** until I see Him face to face.”

That is a **beautiful statement of Henrique’s ministry to Anna;**

that she **genuinely encountered God in him.**

But it is **also a reminder** that Anna **helped** Henrique

become that image of God;

through her relationship with him.

She **called him out of himself** to live biblical justice -

to serve beyond simply doing what’s expected.

A service where he chose **to walk the extra mile** –

to love her and to minister to her every step of the way.

Unfortunately, too many Catholics **live,**

and too many priests **preach ethical justice** alone:

which means giving others simply what they deserve.

This is **important,** yes, **but not enough.**

The **justice** Jesus **commanded** is **to love all others**

as Jesus has loved and loves us.

Not an invitation, a command. Not easy.

Many Catholics still see social justice as an **option-take it or leave it.**

Others claim it has **nothing to do with the faith.**

Still, others see it as **the tears of bleeding hearts for the lazy on welfare.**

Most Catholics prefer leave it to the Office of Justice and Peace.

Sisters: we are the Body of Christ.

What the Spirit **is for** Christ, the Spirit **is for** us.

What the Spirit **does for** Christ, the Spirit **does for** us.

What the Spirit **sends him** to do, the Spirit **sends us** to do.

The Spirit, *says Jesus today, quoting* the prophet Isaiah:

sends me “to bring glad tidings to the poor...

to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

The Spirit sends him to **heal**, to **free**,
to **restore**, to **bless**, to **bring to fulfillment**.

As members of his Body, Jesus makes it possible for us
to **make that desire present and felt** in our own time and place,
to **heal, to free, to restore, to bless...**

He not only makes it possible, he intends it, he expects it of us.

May that desire **translate** into willingness on your part to respond,
and **turn** that willingness into action.