

Homily for Sunday January 27th 2019. 3rd Sunday Year C

Those words of the Prophet Isaiah were very familiar to Jewish people at the time of Jesus. They proclaimed a message of hope. The Jews were an occupied nation subject to the whims of their Roman masters. Isaiah speaks about liberation and transformation. The people that Saturday morning in the synagogue in Nazareth will have listened to the familiar words. So far so good.

But then he continued:

"This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen."

This is a stupendous claim. He is claiming to be the long-awaited saviour, the one who would set Israel free.

Those familiar words on the lips of Jesus take on a much deeper meaning. Jesus has come not just for the people of Israel but for the whole human race. As disciples of Jesus they describe the task he sets before all of us.

I don't mean by that that you or I can possibly do all these things on our own. But as baptised Christians we are together the Body of Christ, His Church. We are each of us different parts of that body. Isaiah's words set out the task given by God to Christ. That task he shares with the Church, with each of us, the members of His Body.

Perhaps we can spend just a few minutes thinking about what that might mean in practice. Like Jesus we have each been anointed at Baptism and again at Confirmation. Empowered then by The Holy Spirit we are to bring good news to the poor.

In this context the poor are those who do not know God, and are blind to his love.

We have to ask why are they are blind to God and his presence in the world? The answer may be that we are obstacles in their way.

The Church itself can be a stumbling block.

What image of God do we present to those who are searching?

The scandals that are reported from different parts of the world can and do turn people away. I am not talking about the sins of human weakness that are part of being human. I am talking about the abuse of power and authority in the Church, about double standards and about hypocrisy. I need not go into details. Jesus Himself was strong in condemning such behaviour on the part of The Pharisees in his own day.

How much more strongly would he condemn such behaviour among us!

Corruption is inevitable in human affairs. Public life in our own country is not immune to it, but it can also be found in the Church when religious authority is used to condemn those who are doing the best they can in the often complicated circumstances of their lives. Jesus warned the Pharisees about laying heavy burdens on others and doing nothing to help them.

Can we truly say that the same does not happen in the Church today at times?

On our own we cannot change everything but we can and must do what we can to set people free from a sense of hopelessness. We must witness to Christ's love and compassion with everyone we meet. We must always inspire them to hope and to trust. We can help to set the downtrodden free.

