

# Sunday Thought

23rd January 2022 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Readings

Nehemiah 8: 1 – 3,5,6,8 – 10

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 31a

Luke 4: 14 – 21

**Reflections of Glory** It was full moon this week. I stood for a while beneath a cloudless sky, soul-thrilled at the glory of all creation showered in silver. There is greater glory in the sun, but only in disguise, early and late. Its true glory is better seen in the moon's reflected light. Such is our understanding of the glory of God. No human eye can look on him. Even Isaiah's splendid Temple vision was clouded and wrapped in seraph wings. We do see God's splendour however in reflections of his glory. This week's scriptures are all about those divine reflected glories.



The words from Nehemiah's autobiography relate the story of how the Israelite people, under an edict of the emperor Artaxerxes, returned from their enforced exile in Persia. Nehemiah stresses how the glory of God's is seen in his laws and in his people's faithful obedience to them. He had heard how discontent and disloyalty were hindering progress in the reconstruction of Jerusalem and its plans for new life and he firmly believed that the true basis for the renewal they were seeking lay in revering God and being in awe of his commandments and judgements. He tells of how he began by assembling the people in a great square near the city gates and had Ezra the priest read the law to them in a translation they could understand. They had been away long enough to be unfamiliar with their native tongue. The people stood, listening from dawn to midday when, moved to tears, they spontaneously knelt in worship. At that point Ezra told them to go home, prepare a feast, not forgetting to invite the poor, and celebrate the glory of God's law as their hope of a new society.

The role of the Church is still to make known the glory of God in his commandments through which we may have peace, justice, equality etc. We are called to show the world how all humanity depends on glorifying those commandments in word and in life. This is truly a word for our time too. Psalm 19 continues the theme reminding us how God's laws are the foundation of good community life. I often pray for God's commandments to be observed world-wide and think I understand how Nehemiah's people felt – reduced to tears and personal repentance – with a challenging vision of the world filled with the glory of God! It still begins with his '*Go home. Make yourself a feast. Share it with the poor and despised and see the glory of God reflected in whole communities right round the world.*'

Today's words from Paul's letter today to Christians at Corinth show how the Church as 'the body of Christ' is God's instrument for proclaiming his basic law of love for him and for all people in every life situation. But it must be a work of the whole body! United! For over sixty years now I have worked at Christian Unity for this very reason. Paul is talking of individual churches becoming the living image and word of Jesus in a community. But that cannot be achieved by fragmented gifts, each refracted in such a way as to dazzle and blind each other. As in a human body every part must work for the good of it all. One sick part may affect the whole! A damaged big toe for instance! Cartoonists have had a field day with Paul's imagery. There is much room for imagination. But what about a church where every member contributes personal gifts to the whole body and its community glimpses a reflection of the glory of God because Christ Jesus Spirit is at work is among us through his Spirit!

The psalmist also refers to reflections of God's glory which all of us recognise. *'How clearly the sky reveals God's glory without words and music'*, although they make their contribution. We shall not need to be reminded of a glorious sunset or the first comforting rays of dawn following a night of bedside watching – moments when we know God IS with us in joy as in pain, in faith as in doubt.

There is one more reflection of divine glory – the best! Jesus! Even more life-enhancing than all others! The gospel reading today is about the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth where, bearing the radiance of baptism and the weariness of six weeks walking the desert in the company of the devil, he explained his work-plan as a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. *"If you want to see the glory of God, look to the physical, spiritual, mental freedom God gives through Jesus."* He is God's glory! I find it sad that we often stall at the human picture of Jesus and miss the greater wonder and privilege of being a friend of divine royalty - the King of all kings, the co-creator of the universe who has the full nature of God and by his cross has revealed the secret of peace and unity for the whole universe! *He spoke with me today!!*

How is that for a reflection of God's glory? Can you see its light bouncing off our lives, off our little bit of the universal church, in every aspect of its beauty, a token of a far more wonderful splendour?

A Prayer (with Psalm 19 in mind)

Thank you, Lord, for reflections of your glory  
In the everyday wonders of your continuing creations,  
In every lifting of life's burdens from lives like ours,  
In every moment when our prayers cry out through Jesus,  
When Christ-like wonder shines from his Spirit in us.  
May we live in your presence and share heaven's chorus,  
Glory! Glory! Glory to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

