

[Opinion](#)
[Spirituality](#)



(Unsplash/Gift Habeshaw)



by Thomas Gumbleton

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

January 31, 2019

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Soundcloud

As we begin our reflection on the readings of today, I think one thing is quite clear. We might call this Sunday, because of the readings, Commitment Sunday. Commitment, where we as followers of Jesus renew our commitment to follow his way, to proclaim his word, to work with him to make the reign of God happen.

In the first lesson, you find the chosen people hundreds of years ago renewing their commitment. They had fallen far from faithfulness to the covenant they had entered into with God at the time of Moses and their freedom from slavery in Egypt when God proclaimed God's law and they committed themselves to follow it, to be his people and God would be their God.

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

[January 27, 2019](#)

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

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

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

Because of their failure, they had been carried off into exile. For decades, they suffered. Their city, Jerusalem, their main city, and the temple had been totally destroyed.

Finally, through the intervention of Cyrus, the ruler of Persia, who conquered Babylon where they were in captivity, they were freed to go back. They came back and then they had to begin to rebuild their temple, their cities, and their whole community life. As their work progressed, they came to a point where they were ready now to renew their commitment.

So we hear in that first lesson the priest proclaiming the Torah, the law that God had given to them that bound them to God in a covenant of love, a covenant of service. The people, all of them, as we hear in this passage from the book of Nehemiah, all the people, even the children, listened to that proclamation of the law.

At the end, they proclaimed their determination to renew that covenant, to renew that commitment, to be God's people and God would be their God. It's a marvelous time of renewal for the people.

They undertake now to live faithfully according to the ways that they had committed themselves centuries before.

The Gospel lesson — isn't this also clearly a time of commitment? Jesus, who has begun his public life, comes to Nazareth where he grew up, goes into the synagogue, and is chosen to be the reader for that synagogue service. It's clear that Jesus has a very special purpose because Luke tells us he carefully unrolls the scroll until he finds the place where it is written.

This is [Chapter 61](#) of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah where it is written, "The Spirit of God is upon me. God sent me to proclaim good news to the poor, to give the blind new sight, to heal the brokenhearted, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim God's year of favor."

Then Jesus makes a commitment. "This day, this Scripture passage is fulfilled even as you listen."

Jesus is saying, "I am the one who is called to proclaim that the Spirit of God is upon me and God sends me to do God's work." We know that Jesus carried out that commitment.

There is a [passage](#) in the Gospel of Matthew where John the Baptist in prison is beginning to doubt (or his disciples at least are, but perhaps John himself), and he sends disciples to Jesus, asking, "Are you the one who is to come or shall we wait for another?"

Advertisement

What does Jesus tell them? Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you see and hear. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the good news is reaching the poor. How blessed is the one who does not take offense at me."

So Jesus is reassuring John that he has made this commitment and he's beginning to carry it out.

Now we know that we, too, have made a commitment in our lives through our baptism, through our confirmation to be disciples of Jesus, to follow him, to live according to his way, to proclaim his message, and to engage in the very work that he came to do: to transform our world into the reign of God where God's love oversees and guides all of our activity. The reign of God, where everyone begins to live according to God's way and all people share in the gifts that God has given for all. Our commitment is to do this work of Jesus.

If you remember from [last week](#) when we were reading the Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians as we also do this week, but last week prepared the way for this week's lesson, where Paul tells the people that we all have gifts. One is to speak with wisdom through the Spirit. Another teaches according to the same Spirit. To another is given faith in which the Spirit acts. Another is a gift of healing, consoling. Another is a prophet, someone proclaiming God's message. Another helps to discern God's way. All of these gifts we share.

I mention maybe for our benefit today and our reflection today something that many of us would say, "Oh no, not I," to the gift of prophecy. What does that mean? It means to proclaim God's message, to be the spokesperson for God as Jesus was.

What is the main message and one that we need especially to hear in our time? It's a message about God is love; where there is love, there is God. If we were living that, proclaiming that message, "God is love; where there is love, there is God." This is a quote from the [Letter of John](#) and he goes on to say, "And this is the love I mean: not that we love God, but that God first loved us."

We begin to experience that love, live it, proclaim it and reach out to others in love. Our world is broken — wars, violence and hatred. Isn't the message of Jesus very important right now? God is love.

We have to try within our families to be prophetic in this way, to proclaim who God is, to bring God's presence into our family life, love our neighborhood, our community, our country and our world. These are the ways that we become prophetic, by showing the love for one another that Jesus asks of us. Don't just love those who love you; love your enemy. Do good to the one who hurts you.

A challenging message, of course, very challenging, but we are called to be messengers and to proclaim this message, to be prophets, to say who God is and to show who God is. This can begin to transform our world into the reign of God.

All those other gifts — teaching, discerning what is good and bad, trying to develop a spirit of wisdom, or one final thing — the way that Jesus in another part of Matthew's Gospel proclaimed how precious is the world in which we live.

Our planet, the birds of the air — God takes care of them. The flowers of the field — God takes care of them. We must imitate that, cherish our planet, help our planet to come back to its best existence, to heal the places of our planet that we have been destroying, and to make sure that we end this devastation that is gradually bringing about changes that will make our planet unlivable. This is another way in which we carry out our commitment to follow Jesus.

It's an extraordinary challenge that we face. But we have been baptized. We have been confirmed. We share the Spirit of Jesus. If we turn to him, learn from him, enable him to live more fully within us, we become the messengers of God's love. We become the ones who carry out the work of Jesus to transform our world into the reign of God, to make it possible for everyone to have a full, human life, to bring peace, fullness of love and joy through our actions in following Jesus.

I hope as we listen to today's lessons and hear this call to renew our commitment that each of us, deep within our spirit, turn to Jesus and say: Yes, I will follow you. I renew my commitment to proclaim your good news by the way I live. Wherever I go and whatever I do, I will be your messenger to bring your love to our world.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Jan. 27 at a home Mass in Frankfort, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*