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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, S.T.L., S.S.L., D.Phil.**

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## Christ's Presence in Our Lives

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# **Christ's Presence in Our Lives**

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## **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

January 27, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Neh 8:2-10; Ps 19:8-15; 1 Cor 12:12-30; Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21

### **CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

As we face the challenges of life, whether on the level of the large communities to which we belong or in personal decisions, we must be grounded in a profound friendship with God. As Christians we believe that a pattern of dying and rising is integral to life itself. "By baptism, people are plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ: They die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him" (Vatican II, *Constitution on the Liturgy* #6). The other sacraments continue this process of deepening our union with Christ in his death-and-resurrection. "To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass...he is present in his Word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church" (Liturgy #7).

The Christian experience of Word-and-Sacrament is rooted deeply in the tradition of Israel. The Hebrew term *dabhar* means word, thing and event, demonstrating the intimate unity of the spoken word and the sign or symbol conveying an understanding of God's presence among his people. The great events whereby God rescued his chosen community and enriched its life would be celebrated from one generation to the next through words, signs and gestures. As the written Word was proclaimed the people's faith linked them to the great messengers of the past and they were challenged to re-live the call to their ancestors.

During the Babylonian Exile (587-538 B.C.) the people were deprived of the Land, Temple and many of the signs of their Covenant with God. The Torah (the five books of Moses) and the early prophetic writings became central to their existence, along with the Sabbath and the great feasts. When Ezra and Nehemiah led a second wave of Jews back to the Land of Judah, they renewed their national identity with the Torah as their constitution. In a joyous ceremony the people expressed their appreciation of the Word of God in their midst.

This reading of a passage from the Torah, followed by an explanatory homily, became the core of the synagogue service. Sometime later a text from the prophets (Joshua to Malachi) was chosen to complement the Torah selection. The earliest source for the practice of such a second reading is found in the Gospel recounting the visit of Jesus to the synagogue in Nazareth.

Although the Temple liturgies were coordinated by the priests and Levites, the synagogue was governed by educated lay leaders. Anyone esteemed in the community could read and comment on the texts. Jesus' return to his home town after his baptism and testing in the desert coincided with the Sabbath when Isaiah 61 was read. This passage discusses the role of God's servant, anointed by the Holy Spirit to teach and to liberate people from oppression and darkness.

St. Luke recorded the essence of Jesus' homily in an astounding declaration: "Today this

Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). This emphasizes the actuality of God's Word in the life of his people. What they hear in worship will have profound impact on their lives because Jesus is in their midst. The Church applies this truth to the Liturgy of the Word, especially the proclamation of the Gospel. We stand in readiness to put Christ's teaching into practice and our responses express the faith that he is addressing us *today*, in our current needs and challenges.

The term "today" occurs at four key points in St. Luke's Gospel. In the fields near Bethlehem, shepherds were told: "Today in David's city a Savior has been born to you..." (2:11). Those who had known Jesus from childhood were invited to acknowledge his mission of service (4:21). By the presence of Jesus (whose name means "The Lord is Savior") with Zacchaeus, he learned that "Today salvation has come to this house..." (19:9). The thief who rebuked his partner and asked to be remembered when Jesus would come into his kingdom was promised: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23:42-43). May our recognition of Christ's presence in our daily challenges bring us to hear the same consoling promise!