

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 26, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“Nehemiah was an official of the Persian court whom King Ar-ta-xerxes authorized to go to Jerusalem, in the province of Judah, and rebuild the city.” (The Navarre Bible, Book of Nehemiah, Introduction).

Allow me to begin our reflection by offering a bit of historical context. The Jewish descendants of Jerusalem and Judah have returned from captivity in Babylon. Upon their arrival, they find a city still suffering from the devastation wrought upon their parents and grandparents at the hands of the Babylonians. This suffering and destruction was allowed to happen by God who had warned the people, through various prophets, of the danger of forsaking Him. These new inhabitants are guided by Ezra (a priest) and Nehemiah (a layman) to begin the process of rebuilding. Our chapter, read today, describes the proclamation and explanation of the Law and the celebration of the feast of Booths (Tents or Tabernacles).

I draw your attention to the reaction of the people as they listen to the words of the Law (part of the Pentateuch) being read. Upon hearing these words of the Lord, their response is to weep. We may ask ourselves: “Why this reaction, this grieving?” For some, this might have been the first time they had heard these words. For others, they might have realized the sufferings they had endured were due to their families. The children, now adults, had suffered in a foreign land due to the sins of their parents. Lastly, there might have been those listeners who, upon hearing the Law, realized they were still not obeying God and in need of His Mercy. It is the “theorized reaction” of this last “fictional group” which I offer for your consideration.

In our mind, and using our surroundings as a guide, imagine yourself standing outside of what used to be this church. The city around you still bears the marks of a battle from decades past. As often as you have heard the stories of the glory of this city, what you see now is a far cry removed. You stand there listening as I read the words of the Law, for our reflection, the Ten Commandments. **I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me.** You question: “Do I truly love God; does He hold the first place in my heart?” **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.** You question: “Have I used the name of God in cursing or lightly making Him the punchline of my jokes and stories?” **Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.** You question: “How often have I or has my family failed to give God His just due by attending service on His Day (Sundays and Holy Days)?” **Honor your father and your mother.** You question: “How have I or how did I treat my parents? Did I show them respect and love as they grew older? Was I disobedient, ungrateful or disrespectful to them? When they became sick, did I view them as a burden, an inconvenience upon my time?”

And hearing these words of the Law and reflecting upon them in their hearts, the people wept. They wept for they realized they too had been as unfaithful as their ancestors. My family, has our own shortcomings toward the Law of God elicited a similar response from us? Have we felt that same remorse when we realized: “I too am at fault.” We need not weep, as they did, even though we have something (someone) greater than they. Our humility, our sadness, should not be from our failure to abide by words upon a page. Our sadness should arise from a deeper place for our offenses are so much greater.