



Things to Ponder

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Jesus' Agenda

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

When the President of the United States takes office, it is customary for him to layout his agenda for the next four years, outlining the major policies and the shifts from the past that he promises to enact during his term.

Today's Gospel (Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21) catches Jesus in a similar situation. Fresh from His baptism and from His temptation by the devil in the desert, He utters the first words of His public ministry. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus lays out His four-part agenda: “to proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.”

He is speaking to the people of His own hometown, Nazareth, and they like what they hear. They are amazed at words that came from His lips. But instead of believing Him, they began to doubt Him. After all, they knew Him since He was a child. Proving the proverb that “familiarity breeds contempt,” they turn on Him, drive Him out of town and try to throw Him from a precipice to His death.

Jesus' agenda was not limited to the audience at Nazareth, nor was it limited to the people of His time. The words Jesus speaks are the words of the one who still lives among us and whose agenda remains the same. If we are to see His promises fulfilled, then we need to see those areas in our lives where we are imprisoned, where we are blind, where we are oppressed, and in what ways we can enjoy a year of favor from the Lord.

What imprisons me? Probably not cinderblock walls and bars. If the essence of imprisonment is the inability to move freely, then a host of things might be imprisoning us. It could be some form of addiction, whether drugs, alcohol, tobacco, pornography, laziness, or failing health. These are the prisons from which the Lord longs to set us free. That freedom comes not merely from our own efforts, but from accepting the help and grace of God for whom no task is impossible.

What am I blind to? Most of us are not blind in our eyes, but rather in our hearts and minds. Am I blind to the presence of Christ in others? Do I doubt some of the teachings of Christ or the Church, and yet make no effort through reading or talking to resolve those doubts? Am I blind to the ways that people are trying to show their love for me by striving to make us a better person when I would prefer just to remain

the same old me? Am I blind to the needs of the poor in my own community or parish and consequently do little if anything to help them? Am I sometimes blind to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and consequently don't worry about missing Mass? Am I blind to Christ's forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance so make infrequent confessions?

What oppresses me? An unfulfilling job? Financial worries? Anxiety over my children? A problematic marriage? Fear of rejection? Worries about the future or regrets from the past?

Jesus promises to set us free from imprisonment, to restore our sight, to lift our oppressing burdens. But if we want to see Him fulfilling His promise, then we have to know where to see Him at work. It's that ability to recognize the areas where Jesus longs to help us that initiates that year of favor He proclaims in today's Gospel.

The people of Nazareth could not bring themselves to the point Jesus tries to bring us to. Yes, He is my savior, but what does He want to save me from? What does He want to save me for? And will I let Him?

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