

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time: So what is it that you have to offer?

"So what is it that you have to offer?" Tom Ryan asked me that question after he had heard enough of my bellyaching. Tom was a fellow seminarian back when I was in Don Bosco Seminary in the late 60's. That's 1960's not 1860's, although it seems so long ago that it could just as well have been the 1860's. Anyway, I had been complaining to Tom that after three months, it was clear to me that I was not going to be accepted by my classmates. I was in my third year of seminary, but because of previous education that I had, my third year began with me being placed with a different group of seminarians than my first two years. Now some of these fellows had been together seven or eight years. Here I was, a new-comer. It is not that people were mean to me. I just didn't feel like part of the group. I was close friends, though, with Tom Ryan and could complain to him. Only, he didn't want to hear it. Instead he said, "So what is it that you have given to the group to be accepted by the group?"

It all set me thinking. Nothing really, at least not yet. But the track meet was only about four months away. Back in those days, we had over two hundred seminarians. One of the highlights of the year was the interclass track meet, an all-day event followed by a huge victory party. My new class had gotten close to winning the previous year and come in second or a close third. So, I thought about it. Tom was right. I couldn't run fast, but I could run long and the final event was always the cross country run. So I ran every day. I worked hard and was able to get some points for our team. We won by one point. My effort didn't win the day, it was just part of the overall effort of our class. But we did win. From that point on, I was thoroughly accepted by the other guys, and even found myself elected to represent them.

We are all part of a grand event. We each have a role to play in this event. What is your role? What is my role? How well do we play our part? "So what is it that you have to offer? So what is it that I have to offer?"

The event is grand. It is no less than the re-creation of the world. The first words of today's Gospel are the introduction to the entire Gospel of Luke. These four lines are written in a highly artistic style, in classical Greek, not the common everyday Greek of the rest of the Gospel and New Testament. Most probably the first draft of this Gospel placed these words exactly where today's Gospel places them, directly before Jesus' first sermon in the Synagogue in Nazareth. A later editor placed the Lucan infancy narratives, the Lucan Christmas story, between the two. But, Luke probably wanted the introduction exactly where we heard it today.

Let me paraphrase this:

O Lover of God, O Theophilus, many have written *narratives of what has happened*. I also did a detailed study to present these events accurately and in a way for you to understand the significance of what has happened.

*Jesus returned to Galilee after his baptism by John in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*He went to the local Synagogue and read the passage about the Spirit of God. That passage from Isaiah prophesied a time when the Spirit of God would come upon the Chosen One. People would experience the Messiah's presence in the healing of the blind and the proclamation of the good news to the poor. Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing. The New World has begun.*

And we are part of this. You and I. What is it that we each have to offer? We each have unique gifts and talents. Some are prophets, apostles, healers, teachers, mothers, fathers, priests, ministers, artists, handymen, care givers, engineers, mechanics, accountants, investors, service men and women. Some are health care workers, others protectors of legal rights. Some design buildings, others build them. All are different. Everyone is necessary. Together we each have our roles in the Grand Plan, God's plan of love for his people. Together we constitute the vehicle for God's plan. Together we make God's plan a reality. Together we make up the Body of Christ.

We should never think that our role is insignificant. We should never think that our part is too little. We should never reduce ourselves to a number. The Body of Christ needs every part, every person, to fulfill his or her role in life so that God's plan can triumph over the powers of evil. Perhaps, you work hard to make a life with your husband or wife; you spend endless hours molding your children, you wonder what part your checking over fifth grade math homework has in the grand scheme of your life. The love, the care, and the encouragement you give to that fifth grader helps him or her become the person God created your child to be.

Perhaps, you are no longer working, in fact retired for so long that you happily forget what it was like to get up for work every day. You go about your routine the best you can, interrupting your week with a visit to this or that doctor, or two visits, or more. You wonder what part your life has in God's plan. You forget that those younger than you are looking to you for wisdom and understanding and an example of a living Christianity.

Perhaps, you aren't married, you aren't retired, and you wonder, what significance can there be to your life? How do you treat people? Do they see you as a Christian in the way you approach your life and in the way you respect their lives? Do you reach out to others in their needs with your time? Do you give an example of Christ's love? Why would you doubt the significance of your role in God's plan?

Perhaps, you are young and in school. Maybe you are a child in grade school or a Teen in high school or a young adult in college. You have tons of homework and wonder why you should take it so seriously. What does this have to do in the Grand Scheme? If you do your best to realize your potential, to become all you can become, then you will be able to fulfill the role that the Body needs you to fulfill. More than this: if you work as a Christian, if you fight off selfishness and are determined to be good to others, then you will be fulfilling the particular role that God has set aside for you right now.

The scriptures are being fulfilled in our hearing. The world is being recreated. The Body of Christ is transforming the world. We are this Body. Jesus is our head.

So, what is it that you, that I, have to offer?