
EASTER : MISSION OF LIBERATION



During these most important days of Holy Week, I want to thank the Lord Jesus for bringing the Good News to the poor, proclaiming freedom to prisoners, and bringing light to the blind. I want to thank him for freeing the oppressed and for proclaiming a year of grace. These few words spoken by Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum revealed the mission of liberation which he was undertaking in our world on behalf of God the Father.

MISSION OF HOPE

[Christ] was sent into the world on a most difficult mission, but what a grand and marvellous mission it was. A mission of hope that concerned all human beings of every era and all nations. A liberating mission which would quickly and easily pit him against the forces of his time. All he had had to say was: *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"*, [Luke 4:21] that all in the synagogue were filled with rage and tried to get rid of him by hurling him off the cliff. This Jubilee year, this year of grace was good tidings to some, but to others it was terrible and unacceptable news. In the biblical tradition, one of the most powerful visions of a new beginning is that of the Jubilee. Every fifty years, slaves are to be released from bondage, property is to be redistributed, and the land is to be given a time for rest and renewal.

CALL TO JUSTICE

How can we rediscover this tradition and find new ways of articulating it that are appropriate to the challenges of our age? The Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Coalition has given us a number of indications as to how to continue this mission of Christ proclaimed at Nazareth. Jesus began his ministry by announcing good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. All this was placed in the context of "the year of the Lord's favour," echoing the call to Jubilee. [Luke 4:18-19] Certainly those oppressed by slavery and poverty heard these overtones. Throughout his ministry Jesus enacted and taught a Jubilee way of being in the world. His parables spoke of forgiveness of debt as the very embodiment of God's forgiveness. [Mt. 18:21-25; Lk. 7:36-40] The Lord's prayer calls us to forgive the debts of others as ours have been forgiven. Jesus' call to the tax collectors invited them to join in restoring equality in a community of the poor and the wealthy, like that envisaged by the Jubilee.

A NEW DEPARTURE

In a variety of other ways, Jesus' message and actions embodied Jubilee. The healings and the resultant restoration of the ill to the community, the feeding of those who followed him, Jesus' open invitation to all to join in the new community forming around him - all of these demonstrated the return of right relation within the community at the heart of Jubilee. All demonstrate a new beginning in Jesus, the new beginning for the people and the land that Jubilee also proclaimed. Throughout the New Testament this vision is proclaimed: in the first Christian communities' sharing all their possessions so that no one should go in need (Acts 2:43-47); in John's and James's admonitions regarding caring for those in need (James 1:27, 2:15; 1 Jn. 4:14); in Paul's call for the community to bear one another's burdens and give generously to those in need (Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 7 and 9); in Paul's vision of the Earth itself groaning in travail as a redeemed reality is birthed (Rm. 8:18-25).

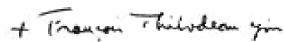
NEED OF A VISION

At the dawn of a new century and a new millennium we need a vision which offers the greatest challenge ever on behalf of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We feel both intimidated and inspired by this challenge, and together we can commit ourselves to work at this renewal. We make this commitment because we are convinced that God is at work in history and shall continue to work after a new era of justice and harmony has been established throughout the world. Such a vision leads us to imagine alternatives to the conventional "solutions" which are failing humanity and the Earth. It challenges notions of ever-increasing wealth, growth, and progress with a plan for a cyclical restoration of right relation. Within this plan, time is sacred, recognizing the cycles of our Earth and our lives. It responds to a people and an Earth craving rest, seeking a halt to the race of competition, success, and progress. The Earth belongs to God; our task is to live justly as caregivers of it and of each other.

A WORLD LOVED BY GOD

The Jubilee tradition inspires hope with its vision of a world loved by God in which there is freedom and well-being for all in harmony with the Earth. In a time when many despair, it inspires to dream again and to act to make the dream a reality. To release from bondage is to give every person the possibility of living in total freedom; the remission of debt is to forgive the past; the rest and renewal of the Earth gives a chance to our natural resources: this was what Jesus had in mind when he proclaimed "the year of the Lord's favour," a renewal of all humankind and of Earth itself. And it is to this mission that he intimately associates us. "The Spirit of God is upon me, the Spirit of God has anointed me, the Spirit of God has sent me to proclaim peace and joy!"

Happy Easter!



+ François Thibodeau

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