

intro to Mass: year C, Theophilus

On his last morning at work, Ronald Reagan scheduled time for himself. He entered the oval office, closed the door, sat down at his desk, and reflected on his eight years as president of this nation. This week has been a perfect occasion for us all to evaluate our country. We have inaugurated a new leader, President Bush; we have commemorated a great civil rights visionary, Dr. Martin Luther King; and this very day we mark sixteen years since the legalization of abortion and twenty-two years since the first superbowl.

This is a week to reflect on the legacy we leave to the next generation. What do we want them to have? Those of you who are parents, what do you want your children to have? Good health? Good jobs? Freedom? These are the hopes of an inaugural year.

At Mass today we hear another inaugural address. Jesus of Nazareth enters his home synagogue at the beginning of his public ministry, and interprets a passage from Isaiah. His address is exactly one sentence long, but it sets the crowd on the edge of their seats: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The scripture Jesus reads comments on three aspects of life we all hold dear: money, health, and freedom. He does not criticize those treasures. He knows those are fonts of happiness for us. But Jesus is a realist; he knows we won't all have what we seek. Some of us will be poor; some of us will be prisoners; some of us will be blind, lame, or suffer headaches.

However, there is a cure. There is help for the jobless, sight for the blind, and freedom for prisoners. The cure, for Jesus, is the Gospel, religious belief. The belief that God will save us will transcend all else.

Now, I'll grant you, belief in Jesus alone will not put money in your pocket; it won't get your relatives off your back; it won't make headaches go away. But it does put all of life in perspective. If we believe the big picture, that God loves us and will save us, life's frustrations will become small.

This scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus has worked on your hearts; He has made you his own. I know that because anyone who chooses coming to Church over watching the superbowl has got to have faith in the heart.

Jesus challenges us today to live out this inaugural address: to proclaim good news to the poor, sight to the blind, and freedom to prisoners. People we know are downhearted; let us resolve to build them up, not to put them down. People we know are blind and prejudiced; let us resolve charity for them, lest we too be judged guilty. People we know are prisoners of bad habits, prisoners of themselves; let us resolve to free them with help and good humor, and never abandon them in their need.

The new president of our hearts is Christ. He calls us to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.