

Your words are spirit and life. The Responsorial Psalm really helps culminate all of our scripture readings this weekend. First, we start out with the book of Nehemiah, where Ezra, the priest, comes and after the exile brings up the Israelite people together. In the midst of this gathering, he reads before them all of the law.

Now, what's interesting about this is for many of us we come and we hear "laws" and we start to mumble and groan, "Oh, my gosh, another law? Another rule? Another thing we have to follow?" But the Israelite people were so in love with God that because of the obedience that they sought, because of that love they had for God, were so moved by the words of the law, that not only were they moved to tears, but they were moved that they were just wailing in adoration of God. "Amen! Amen! Your will be done. I believe that this is the truth." So much so that they layed prostrate before the book of the scroll of the law.

Wow! How amazing would it be if we truly understood what the word of God meant for us? Because if we truly understood what the word of God meant for us, it wouldn't just be words. We, too, would have somewhat the same reaction -- I'm not asking for us to all become like Pentecostals and begin to speak in tongues and have reactions to the word. That's not what I'm saying. But at some point, we have to ask ourselves, "Do we truly believe that the word of God speaks to our spirit and gives us life?" How does then the word of God speak to your spirit and give you life? Do we rely on the word? Do we rely on God in every moment of our lives or just sometimes when it gets difficult, or when we're just casting that blame on God. "God, why is this happening? Why is that happening? Why did you let this horrific thing happen?" Or do we also say, "Lord, God, thank you for these things that have happened. Thank you for these opportunities for growth. Thank you for these opportunities to see who you are and to see then who I am in reflection of your love."

That's what our first reading from the book of Nehemiah is challenging us to look at. The truth that lies in the witness of the law of God.

Let's continue through the readings for this weekend. We have a reading from St. Paul to the Corinthians. That reading where every year I talk about how I'm the big toenail on the Body of Christ. If you were here last year, you know the reference. If not, you're about to get it.

I talked to Father Foshee yesterday. He said, "What are you talking about the big toenail of the Body of Christ?"

Well, for me, I'm a spatial person. And so I look at things realistically. So if we are members of the Body of Christ, what part of the body am I?

Well, having lost my big toenail at a young age, due to ingrown toenails and all that. That's no fun. But having lost it at a young age, I realize their importance. That your big toe's main purpose is balance. Because you know that one time you stub your toe, you're not going to walk the same for a couple of days. You're going to kind of start hobbling and limping, right?

Well, what's the purpose then of the big toenail? It's to protect the toe that gives balance to the body. So as a pastor, as a Priest, my role is to protect the faithful and to bring balance to order. Big toenail/Father Danny. Right? (Congregation laughing.)

I had this revelation a few years ago, "That makes perfect sense." And I take pride in the fact that my role, in the Body of Christ, is to be the big toenail because it gives me a purpose. It means that my role isn't to come up with all of the ideas. My role isn't to have all of the fervor that feeds the body, that the heart pumps that blood through, or to have that blood that gives life to the body. No, my purpose is stability. My purpose as pastor being here, when I went to the Archbishop, was to say, "Father, both of these parishes of St. Roberts and Corpus Christi need some stability. Name me or my successor as a pastor so they can have a sense of stability.

But if I thought I was the lifeblood, then I wouldn't have gone that far. I would have said, "No, it all resides on me. I have to be the one here to make sure that everything works out perfectly. Because if I'm not here, it's all going to go to hell."

Well, it's not true. As you've noticed over the last few months when I wasn't here. We are still here. Thanks be God.

But when we look then at our reading from Paul to the Corinthians, what's important there is that we are, through our baptism, members of the Body of Christ. We talked about a couple of weeks ago, at the Baptism of Jesus, how we all have a specific role. Many times we don't realize our role in the Body of Christ because we are like what St. Paul said in the reading today, "We are like the arm that says, 'Well, I'm just the arm, what can I do? I'm just a foot, what can I do? How can I participate in his body if I can't do the functional role that I think I want to do?'"

Many times we are so busy looking at others' gifts and talents that I've spoken of before, we don't realize the gifts that God has given to us.

God doesn't want you to be someone else. God wants you to be you. So he's given you the gift and talents and skills that you need to be you, as you in the Body of Christ, not to be someone else as their part of the Body of Christ.

But many times we get frustrated about that because we want to be like someone else, want to be as athletic as one person -- maybe that's just me -- or we want to be as smart as this person, or as ministerial as this person. As St. Paul reminds us, not all are called to be apostles, not all are called to be preachers, not all are called to be teachers. But we are all called to what our specific role is in the Body of Christ. The fact that you were baptized means you have responsibility as a member of the Body of Christ. Each and every one of us that are in here, that are baptized, has a responsibility as a member of the Body of Christ in whatever way God calls for you.

For some of you it may be to get your spouse to heaven. That may be your only responsibility. For some of us, that's a big responsibility or big task. For some of us it may be to get our children to heaven, because our spouse knows what they're doing -- rare, but few and far between, but it does happen that our spouses know what to do.

But the reality of the situation is God is calling each and every one of us to take a look at our lives and say, "What gifts have I been given that I haven't put to use for God's greater glory?"

I've talked before about the gifts that we see under the Christmas tree of faith. That we see these and when it comes to God we are less like a little child and more like an adult. We are patiently waiting for gifts to be unwrapped. We want to see what's out there. We don't want to unwrap our gifts. But God calls us to have the faith of a child. Because you remember when you were a kid, you see the gifts under the tree. They're really excited. And when mom and dad aren't looking, they shake on the left, shake on the right. Is it a puzzle? Is it a book? Something made a noise, it's probably an animal. What is this gift that is under the tree with my name on it? They're excited. So much so that on Christmas morning sometimes we go down and open the presents before everybody gets up. Don't do that. (Congregation laughing.) Unless your family allows it. Our family did not. I found that out the hard way once.

(Congregation laughing.)

But we go through and we unwrap these gifts as a child and we're so excited to see what's in them that we don't care about the wrapping paper, and we don't care about being nice and neat and recycling. No, we just want to see what is in there. We just want to see the gifts that we have been given.

And then what do we do that day? We play with every single thing we've gotten. Even if only for five minutes, we want to try everything out. So much so that if mom and dad don't have the AA or AAA batteries, we say "Mom and Dad, go to Wal-Mart. Go get me batteries to play with my toy."

"Wal-mart is closed."

"But I can't wait until tomorrow to play with my toys. I'm so excited to play with these gifts."

When it comes to God, and the gifts that he's given to us, some of them are beginning to collect dust. We are less excited. A lot of that has to do with when God gives us gifts, he also gives us responsibility. That if we recognize our gifts, then we, well, have to use them. Which means that we

may have to change the way that we're living our lives. We may have to make some adaptations and some edits to our lives to figuring out, "Huh, I'm not living how God wants me to live. I'm choosing pleasure over pain." In the hedonistic society in which we live, that's what we're taught. Avoid pain at all costs and seek the biggest amount of pleasure we can in anything that we can have. But that's not the life of a Christian. That's the life of comfortability.

Nobody wants to see pain. Does anybody want to see pain? Rarely. But the life of a Disciple of Christ is to bear the burden of our cross and to follow after Christ.

Yet sometimes the life of a disciple is to live a life of pain: Sometimes physical, sometimes not; sometimes emotional, sometimes relational. But the life of a Christian is to accept that law with such gratitude, with such love.

And when Jesus came, he's not holding us to the law that -- in the book of Nehemiah Ezra read to the Israelites. He's not holding us to that law. He's holding us to the law of "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, with all of your being; and love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the law that we are being able to look at. That's the law that we are being held that we profess every week being held to this law.

For many of us it's difficult. For most of us, or all of us, it's difficult to love our neighbor because we are jealous of their role in the body. We want to be them and not be us.

Goes back to the grass is always greener on the other side. Well, I hate to quote Justin Bieber, but the grass is greener wherever you water it. (Congregation laughing.) He's not the first one to come up with that, but every time I bring it up to younger people, they say, "Oh, Justin Bieber had that in a song." Believe me he didn't come up with that. If he did, Bravo. But I'm pretty sure it predates him. But in our lives wherever we put that time, wherever we put forth that motivation, that's where we're going to be able to see the goodness of God. That if you want to have a happy marriage, you have to put time into your marriage; which means time into praying for your spouse, praying with your spouse, praying with your kids if you have kids, time into listening to one another.

I'm rather touching on a touchy subject with some people. (Congregation laughing.) Didn't expect a laugh, but okay, that will work.

But for some of us, the reason that we don't do well in relationships is because it's that hedonistic relationship. It's all about "I want to get out what I want to say. I don't care what you have to say. Listen to what I have to say. Don't try and fix it, don't try and judge me, just listen. And once I'm done talking, just be quiet because I don't want to hear what you have to say."

That's how we many times live. We don't care what the other one has to say, we just want to get out and say it and just have it out. But that's not helping.

But many times that's how we pray to God. We go to God and say, "I've got this problem, this problem, this problem, this problem. Help me out. Help me out. Help me out. Amen. Bye."

That's many times how we pray to God. It's a task for us to sit in that silence because most of us are terrified by silence.

In fact, this last week when I was teaching I had multiple times in class where I had ten to 15 seconds of silence and the teacher's class I was talking in, he would interrupt every time. I finally said, "I got this. I'm okay with the silence."

Afterward, we had a conversation, he said, "I'm not though. I've got to always have something going on."

I said, "No, if we're always talking, it makes it difficult for those who are introverts to think."

I'm an extrovert. I have to talk, as you know very well by now. I like to talk. No so much to hear my voice but because that's how I process. But for an introvert, that can be one of the most tedious things in the world to listen. Because if they're listening, they can't process.

You have to have that time of silence. That's why the most important time we can spend with God isn't in intercessory prayer, but in silent contemplation. That even in the role of the Body of Christ, that could be your role, to just sit in silence and listen. Because you begin to see after you listen.

One of the gifts that I'm convinced that God has given me is I can walk into a room of people I may not even know, and I can already know who gets along, who doesn't get along, what's going on, just by social cues. It's really interesting. Sometimes it works and 20 percent of the time it doesn't. But that's because I'm still trying to perfect that gift that God's given to me. But like with any gift, as with any skill we've been given, it takes practice to make perfect.

How interesting is it that we say we practice Catholicism, we practice our faith? That means we have to try. Doesn't mean we're always going to get it right, it means we have to try and try and try and try, until we reach perfection which is not going to happen in this life my brothers and sisters. You will never reach perfection in this life. But that does not give you the dismissal to stop practicing.

So I've discovered my role in the Body of Christ. Some days it's to be the protector, some days it's to be that voice of balance.

What's your role? And how is God calling you to live out your role as a member of the Body of Christ, as a member of the parish?