

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

God's Words Lead to Joy In the Lord

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 1:1-4; 4:14-21. (R1) Neh. 8:2-6, 8-10. (R2) 1 Cor. 12:12-30.

The word "Watergate" conjures up all kinds of nasty connotations for us. We think of a nation almost

torn apart by it. We remember laws broken and powerful people trying to cover-up.

In Sunday's first reading we are told that the scribe Ezra stood "before the Water Gate" and read to the people from dawn until noon. Here we see a nation being reborn, the Law upheld and powerful figures involved in revealing the truth.

About 536 B.C. the remnant of the tribe of Judah returned to a burnt-out Jerusalem. In 515 B.C. the Temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah came along about 445 B.C. — the period of Obadiah and Malachi. The Jewish community was struggling at the time. External enemies threatened it; poverty, discontent and religious apathy within weakened it. Nehemiah's arrival as governor was a turning point. He rebuilt the walls of the city and started religious reforms. Ezra came afterwards, about 398 B.C., and brought the Law and the religious authority necessary to restructure the community of faith.

The Jewish religion needed to be redefined. Ezra

did this. He established the Law (Torah) as sacred writing, inspired by God. Ezra proposed it as the rule of life for the Jewish community and thus became the father of Judaism.

The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles. Men, women, and children old enough to understand were gathered for the feast. Ezra stood on a platform so all the people could see him. When he opened the book of the Law to read, the people stood up in respect for God as the author of the words they were about to hear. From dawn until dusk the people listened attentively. Ezra read in Hebrew, but at that time the people had trouble with the Hebrew. In Babylon they had begun to

learn Aramaic. So the Levites translated the Hebrew into Aramaic and in addition interpreted the meaning of the Law. This interpretation became known as a Targum.

When the people heard the Law, they wept. They wept as they sensed their ingratitude to a God who had been with them throughout their history. But tears of repentance brought joy, and joy led to celebration. The animals slain before the reading of the Law were eaten at a sacrificial meal as in the days of old before the exile.

God's words are always meant to lead one to repentance, then to joy, and joy in the Lord is to be

strength of His people.

And the men who truly shape our destiny, the giants who teach us, inspire us, lead us to deeds of immorality, are those who use words with clarity, grandeur and passion. Socrates, Lincoln, Churchill — Jesus.

But in the mouth of God, inspired by Him, words reach their superlative power. Once Jesus took bread and said, "Change" — and it did. Once Jesus took wine and said, "Change" — and it did. Once He gave the bread and wine to his disciples and said, "Change" — form a new community, a purified people, a joyful people, a celebrating people, a People of God — and it is!

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