

JMJ CHS

Opening day is not too far off. For Tiger fans, it will be April 8th and we are playing the White Sox. But they will be practicing well before that, and I suppose an argument could be made that opening day could actually begin with the first pitch down in Lakeland, Florida.

Or, maybe you could say that the season really begins as soon as the *boys of summer* arrive at Joker Marchant Stadium and two guys step out onto the emerald green diamond, pick up a baseball and start playing catch. They may consider that their opening day.

I suppose that we can ask the same question about Jesus. What was His opening day? Was it His birthday? Christmas? Or more accurately, His Incarnation? (We'll be celebrating that opening day on March 25, *The Annunciation*, nine months to the day before next Christmas.) Or, how about His baptism in the Jordan? It was there that He began to attract disciples. So, again, maybe.

Last week Deacon Jerry preached about the Marriage Feast of Cana. Jesus hadn't scheduled any signs or wonders. He said His hour had not yet come, but His mom exerted some pressure and so He made water into wine. His first miracle. And so it began.

I think an argument could be made for today's Gospel story as being His true "opening day". He has come down from His retreat in the wilderness and returned to Galilee, making His way to His hometown of Nazareth. There, on the Sabbath, He went to His home synagogue, and, as was His custom, stepped up to the plate and was handed the papyrus scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it and put His finger down on the beautiful passage that we just read.

When finished, He rolled up the scroll and sat down. But He wasn't finished; He was really just getting started. He was now on the bench, that is, the seat of Moses which is the official teaching position for the rabbis. And it was there that He interpreted the passage, uttering those famous words, "*Today, in your hearing it, the scripture fulfilled.*" And I'm sure you could have heard a pin drop. From that day on, everything changed. The word was out that Jesus, this simple carpenter, son of Joseph and Mary, was somehow making Himself equal to God. This would be good news for some, but for others it would be problematic. And so, before He left town that day, His neighbors tried to put Him to death. They were prepared to throw the neighbor kid over the cliff. For the sin of blasphemy. But again, His hour had not yet come. All would happen according to God's will.....and in His good time.

## Fr. John's Homily for the 3rd Sunday in OT

I would say that this episode has a lesson for us as well. There will come a time for all of us, sooner or later, when we will be handed the bat and we will step up to the plate. We will have to wear our faith on our sleeve, and will be called upon to explain or defend the faith to someone. And maybe that someone will not be the least bit interested in hearing what we have to say. They may even be hostile towards us, just as they were to Jesus on that day in Nazareth. And just as the hostility grew toward Jesus, I think the hostility towards Catholics will continue to increase to the point where it will be more and more difficult for us to be Catholic, let alone to explain and defend our faith.

I would also like to say a little bit about that first reading from Nehemiah. It has always intrigued me because every time we read it, I mimic the part of Ezra, the priest, in what I am doing right here, right now. He climbed up on a wooden platform, high above the crowd, and read from the scroll of the law. And He interpreted it all for them, just as I'm doing right now, in my homily. And just as Jesus did in the synagogue that day. But, the people were sad and weeping. It was a complex set of circumstances. Emotions were running high. It might have even been tears of joy mixed with tears of sadness. They have come home, returning from exile, the Babylonian Captivity. It lasted 70 years and so their memories have faded. The temple was being rebuilt but it was nothing compared to Solomon's temple, a wonder of the ancient world, which was destroyed many years earlier. Then they are re-introduced to Sacred Scripture as read by Ezra. It is all too much and they are overwhelmed with emotion. But Ezra tells them, "Stop it. This is the Sabbath. The Lord's day... and it is holy. You should be rejoicing." In fact, go out after the service and have a good meal, with a few glasses of wine. It was like their opening day. The beginning of a new era. God had blessed them and there was cause for laughing, cheering and rejoicing.

So, what is the mood of this crowd, right here, right now? I don't see any weeping, but I know a few of you are suffering right now. And, like the ancient Israelites, those emotions can be kind of complex and confusing. On the one hand, you lead a good life. You've got a great family, you have a beautiful roof over your head, you just remodeled the kitchen, you eat very well and your liquor Cabinet is quite full. You have a new SUV in the garage with heated seats. You'll be taking a vacation cruise pretty soon, and maybe a few of you have even got tickets for opening day.

Yet, on the inside you are weeping. You've had friends die of Covid and you are living in fear, terrified that you might get it yet despite the fact that you've had your vaccines and booster shots. But you've looked at the trajectory of our country and our world and you're afraid. For a long time things have been spiraling downward, and all the statistics are bad. There's not a good report to be had. Our government is a humiliation. We are an

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international embarrassment. There is so much lying and corruption that we wonder if there are any good men left. And our churches are pretty empty to begin with, but priest against priest, and bishops against bishops, and Cardinals against Cardinals, and what's this week's bad news from the Vatican from the very Pope himself? And parents and children and each other's throats.

Yes it would appear that there is cause for weeping here, but the admonition is just the opposite. Rejoice. Again I say rejoice. Because God has visited His people. And we have hope that this is not all there is, but that eternity awaits us. All we have to do is remain faithful to God and to trust in Jesus.

You know, there is a new opening day coming. The day when Jesus returns, with new heavens and a new earth. Let let our readings today, and every day, readings from the sacred scriptures, the old and new Testaments combined, the Holy Bible, let these sacred words give us food for thought as to how we might best prepare for that big day.

**~Fr. John**

From your Living Word..... *Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.*