

**Third Luminous Mystery**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**  
**(Lk 4:14-21)**

When Jesus returns to his hometown at the beginning of his public ministry, he uses a prophecy from Isaiah (Is 61:1-2) to introduce himself as the anointed Messiah, and to begin the proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Third Luminous Mystery). Isaiah's prophecy lists several signs of blessing that will come with the Messianic age, including the release of captives and a "*year acceptable to the Lord*" (Lk 4:19).

This "year" mentioned by Isaiah refers to something which is in the Law of Moses. God commanded the nation of His Holy People to celebrate a great "jubilee" every 50 years, in which all debts are forgiven, and all slaves are freed, among other things (cf. Lv 25:8-55).

What would happen in our society today, if the national debt of \$27 trillion were simply wiped away, and everyone's credit card bill and car payments were forgiven? It is not feasible to simply forgive debt, *someone has to pay*. We could not do it. Why would God command the people to do this? How would the ancient banking and loan business survive?

If we think about it carefully, such a law would radically redefine how the society would have to operate. In fact, there could not be much of a banking and loan industry at all, and that is the point. God wants to create a holy society in which He is the Lord and providential master, to whom the people look for blessing and prosperity. God does not want his people to be impoverished and enslaved, which is what ultimately happens via the instrument of debt. God does not want the bankers and creditors to run society and control people's lives; He does not want people to submit to the false god of mammon. He wants His people to be *free*.

In our world God is not the master, and the great buildings in the center of each city are not churches in which God is worshipped, but the financial towers dedicated to mammon. In our consumerist and material society people do not work in order that they may rest on the Lord's Day, they work in order to fuel the economy. Very few people are free from debt. People are lured into the practice of "buy now, pay later," by means of credit cards and easy financing. And pay they do! Often double the original price, due to all the interest charges. Given our human weaknesses, and the seductions of marketing, we easily and quickly fall into situations where we live beyond our means, pursuing "wants" instead of focusing on "needs." Many people have no savings, live from paycheck to paycheck, struggle to meet the "minimum payments" and keep the bill collectors

and creditors at bay. Their house, car, and many household items are not truly theirs. Beyond that, many people live entirely dependent on the government to provide their needs, having no true “ownership” or control over their lives and finances.

In the ancient world of the Bible, when you could no longer pay your debt, you were thrown into “debtor’s prison” in order to work forced labor, or you literally had to sell yourself (or your children) as slaves, in payment. Debt leads to servitude. And where wealthy creditors become unscrupulous in the pursuit of gain, this social situation equates to slavery.

“The blind will see.” Many people today are gaining their sight (Lk 4:18), as they wake up to the way modern globalist corporations and financial institutions have literally taken over governments, societies, and people’s lives, enslaving them to a socialist dependency, determining what health care they are “entitled” too, and what items will be available on the grocery shelves.

Such a society is not a holy nation but an enslaved society under the dominion of the evil one. Therefore God commanded in the Law of Moses that a jubilee year of forgiveness and liberation be celebrated every fifty years. How often did the nation of Israel actually celebrate this jubilee year of God’s grace and blessing? Hardly ever. Never. Instead, the wealthy pursued wealth on their terms, the nation entered into agreements with foreign nations for impure purposes, and as a result Israel lost the prosperity and blessing promised by God in the Covenant. By the time Isaiah makes his prophecy, the nation of Israel has been reduced to slavery, impoverishment, and exile.

Only the Messiah will restore the nation to its proper glory, and he will do so by finally fulfilling the Law of Moses, ushering in a true jubilee year where the captives will be freed, the oppressed will be liberated, the poor will receive good news, and all the people will enjoy God’s favor and blessing, seeing clearly.

In the Kingdom of God, we are “debt-free.” But this is not an earthly kingdom built on money. Jesus does not cancel our worldly financial obligations (though he does teach us a way of stewardship in which we live simply, within our means, and free from enslaving debt). Instead, it is the debt of sin which is forgiven. In his parables Jesus regularly describes sin as “debt,” because when we sin against someone we incur an obligation to them: we are bound in justice to “repay” what we have harmed or taken. If you steal you must return it; if you lie you must correct it with the truth; if you gossip you must restore the good name. Sin incurs debt; it also enslaves. When we give in to our desires and selfish needs, we become slaves of those desires.

The debt of sin must be repaid, and we will be held to that obligation either in this life, or certainly in the next. But with the jubilee year of the Lord, that debt is forgiven, wiped away, here and now, and we are given a “clean slate.” The debt is assumed by Christ himself, and he pays it in full on the Cross. Christ pays the debt of our sin, and he liberates us from slavery to the flesh, the world, and the devil. We are restored to the dignity of sons, established again in the proper stewardship and mastery of our own lives. What the Law of Moses could only point to but not achieve in practice, Christ establishes in reality in his own person, and for his followers. The citizens of the Kingdom of God are slaves and debtors to no one, they have in fact been liberated to freedom by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and forgiveness of sins.

Christians must live according to this freedom, and not return to the slavery of sin. Christians must also imitate Christ in his generosity, so as to enjoy the blessings of God in the jubilee of His Kingdom. What Christ does for us, we must do for each other. As Christ forgives our debts, so we must forgive those who are indebted to us (the literal meaning of the Lord’s Prayer). In the Kingdom of God, the “jubilee” is not every fifty years, it is every year. In the Kingdom of God, we cannot be like the bankers who demand payment and interest. Because it is a jubilee year, we have to forgive the debts others owe us, assuming the expense ourselves. We forgive others and accept the injury, not because they deserve it, but because God forgives and liberates us in Christ.

What Israel was not able to learn and practice from the Law of Moses, we Christians must live fully, in a spiritual way, which also translates into our worldly conduct. The forgiveness of sin and our liberation from slavery is the motivation for all our subsequent Christian activity. The prophecy of Isaiah is not only the beginning of Christ’s public ministry, it is the beginning of Christian life.