

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C

Sunday 9:30/11:30/5:00 St. Peter's Masses - January 23, 2022

(Word of God Sunday)

Nehemiah 8:2-10 "The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the Law."

Psalms 19:7-14 "The Law of the Lord is perfect."

1 Corinthians 12:12-30 "With Christ, in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body."

Luke 1:1-4,4:14-21 "I decided to write an orderly account, so you may know the truth."

Your Word Is Our Strength

Introduction

Today you will hear three sermons. The first lasts about six hours and includes reading of the entire Torah, along with explanations. The second is from Jesus, who reads a passage that takes about 30 seconds and his homily is nine words, so the whole sermon is less than a minute. Six hours. One minute. Then there is my homily. I intend to go somewhere in between those two.

Imagine that today there are maybe half a million priests and a few deacons preaching on this Word of God Sunday, making their best efforts to explain it and to make an application to the lives of up to a billion Catholics all around the world.

The Word of God

September 30 is the feast day of St. Jerome, who famously said in the 4th century, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." Strong words. In 2019, on that day, Pope Francis declared that the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time would be "Word of God Sunday". Pope Francis instituted this Sunday

as the Word of God Sunday, "To enable the Church to experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of his word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world."

The Catechism says of the Bible: "The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body." (CCC 102-103) Then quoting Augustine we read: "One and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers."

For those attending Mass this weekend, you will notice that the Bible will be venerated in front of the Altar. What a grace it is for us to have the Holy Scriptures. May we take time this weekend to give thanks to the Word Made Flesh for leaving us with such a treasury of sacred writings.

The Bible is not meant for a privileged few, continues Pope Francis. It belongs "to those called to hear its message and to recognize themselves in its words". The Bible is "the book of the Lord's people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity".

Today, Luke gives us Jesus' first sermon. He quotes the prophet Isaiah and announces good news for the poor, liberty for captives, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom from oppression.

What is at the heart of the gospel is that through the dying and rising of Christ, God has begun to destroy the evils of the world, to eradicate poverty, injustice, blindness, and oppression. We believe that God has not only promised to do this, but has begun to do this. To use biblical language, we believe that God has begun to establish the kingdom.

We all have evils in our life: dissensions in our family, sickness, innocent suffering, death. We do not understand how these evils can exist in a world

where God is good, but we are convinced that since God has raised up Jesus, the kingdom has begun. And if the kingdom has begun, then in the end God will be victorious.

We must read the Bible “within the living Tradition of the whole Church.” As St. Augustine said, “I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.”

The Catholic faith is not “a religion of the book,” says the *Catechism*; it is “the religion of the word of God”: a word that is not “written and mute,” but “incarnate and living.”

Nehemiah

After the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile, people start to trickle back home. Nehemiah sees the ruins and laments. He resolves to rebuild the city, especially its walls. If Jerusalem is compromised, the whole mission of God is also. Have you ever felt like you had to rebuild the walls of your life, to protect yourself from the things that have hurt you?

Now Ezra comes. He is a priest and concerned for the religious life of the people. They gather the people on a Sabbath and he reads the first five books of the law. As the physical walls defined the city, the Torah defined the people. Men and women and children are listening, discovering again their true identity, which they had forgotten.

They all stood up, as one body, for the word, not for the priest or even the governor. They listened for six hours. Seven times it tells us the word was read "in the presence and hearing of the people." The people kept saying Amen, amen, and lifting their hands, even weeping at times. These are liturgical postures and actions. Then other clergy would give the sense of what the words meant. That's preaching, along with the proclamation.

We need the Word of God to remind us of who we are. We are not what the world tells. We are not what covid tells us. Ancient Israel was needed to know who they were for the sake of the world, so it could announce the Lord to all the world. The Church is the new Israel. Knowing who we are, now we go out to bring the treasure of our identity out to all the nations, to bring the light of Christ to all the world. The Sabbath is for hearing the word of the Lord and for being joyful. and celebrating, but also look around for someone to share with what you have. It's not a time for weeping. This is what Sunday should be like. It can't be all about football, even if you have money on one of the games, even if one of your favourite teams is playing.

Today, each time someone steps up to proclaim the word, you are standing at a prominent place within the worship space. The role of the assembly is not passive. All the people are urgently called to participate, to respond to the challenge of the Word. The day it is proclaimed is also a holy day dedicated to the Lord.

Luke

Luke starts out his Gospel by referencing Servants of the Word and eyewitnesses, "so you may know the truth." He addresses his work to Theophilus, which means those who love God, who are friends of God. In chapter four of Luke's Gospel, we hear that Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth, attending the synagogue on the Sabbath. That's what he used to do when he was growing up. He went to the place where he had been taught the law of God.

Just like the people before Ezra, eyes were fixed on him. They were attentive. As Jesus stands in the synagogue, he reads from the scroll handed to him; it contains the words of the prophet Isaiah. At this early moment in his ministry, Jesus announces his mission. Jesus' ministry will include bringing glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, healing to the

sick, freedom to the oppressed, and proclaiming a year acceptable to the Lord.

Through this text from Isaiah, Jesus announces God's salvation. The “year acceptable to the Lord” is a reference to the Jewish tradition of a year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year, when slaves were set free. There were not supposed to be any of God's people as slaves.

It's an old tradition yet, in Jesus, something new begins. Jesus not only announces God's salvation, he brings this salvation about in himself. Jesus is Yahweh's Anointed One, filled with the Spirit of God. He is the Word made flesh, as John tells us in his Gospel. The Kingdom of God is now at hand. It is made present in Jesus, in his life, death, and Resurrection. Jesus will send the Holy Spirit so that the Kingdom of God can be fulfilled.

Jesus starts out at home. So do we. That's where we begin to live out the Gospel. We don't have to go somewhere else to do that. We are much in need of words of hope and encouragement especially for those who struggle with difficulties in their life and in their faith. The Spirit of Christ has sent us to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to sit the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

1 Corinthians

When Ezra proclaimed the Word, the people listened as one. For that one moment they were one. This has always been God's intention for his people. This is St. Paul's message. All participate as members of the Body of Christ. This is not like belonging to a team or a club. It's an identity. No one can say that the contribution of one member is more important than any other. In this Body, everyone is honoured and appreciated for the particular

task that God has given. We have ideas in the world that some lives are of less value. In the Body of Christ, this is a lie.

Speaking of football, I thought the conversation around a quarterback's broken pinky finger was a good illustration of what Paul is talking about. Just as the Cincinnati Bengals' quarterback Joe Burrow injured his right pinkie finger – the little finger on his throwing hand - and grimaced in pain as he attempted to throw.

"It's just something I am going to have to deal with," Burrow told reporters afterward. I am going to play next week." In talking about the injured pinky finger CBS analyst and former Bengals quarterback Boomer Esiason said at halftime, "My pinkie played a big part in holding onto the football. We'll see how he handles that here in the second half." Analyst Phil Simms added, "You're right, Boomer. Most quarterbacks - their little finger is really important when it comes to controlling the football." I think that's a funny conversation, but a story St. Paul might have told if he was talking to an audience of football fans.

When we separate ourselves from the Church, we separate ourselves from Christ. Today many Christians no longer believe in the Church. They profess faith in Christ but do not see the importance of belonging to the Church. We want to believe only our own version of faith. We end up following, not Christ, but only ourselves.

Call To Action

Consider the "Bible in a Year" Podcast: Again number one on the Apple podcast list.

Now is our time to come out of the exile we have been in. Now is our time to renew our identity. The world will provide many false identities. But we will only live joyfully if we see fulfil our true identity in God, as described in

his Word, the written and proclaimed Word, but most fully in his son, Jesus Christ. We will listen together. We will worship together. We will say our amen, amen, together. We will do all that which is proclaimed together.

God will not impose his will on us. He is patient and waits for our full attention. Once he has that, he will reveal himself one step at a time. When we are ready, all those teachings will make sense. The Lord is going to reward us. Our lives will come to make sense in this revelation.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: O sing a new song to the Lord. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. In his presence are majesty and splendour, strength and honour in his holy place.

Collect: Almighty ever living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works.

Nehemiah: The priest, Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand. He read from early morning until midday. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the Law. All the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. Nehemiah the governor said, "This day is holy to the Lord your God." Then Ezra said, "Go your way and do not weep, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Psalms: Your words, Lord, are spirit and life. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes; enduring forever. Let the words and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and redeemer.

1 Corinthians: With Christ, we were all baptized into one body and made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, there are many members, yet one body. They eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. But God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension, but if one member suffers, all suffer together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Luke: *Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was given to him. He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*