

## **Homily For Tuesday of the First Week of Lent - Year I**

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Tuesday, February 22, 2021**

**Isaiah 55: 10-11** "My word shall ... succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

**Psalms 34:3-18** "I sought the Lord and he delivered me from all my fears."

**Matthew 6: 7-15** "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

### **No Empty Words**

#### **Introduction**

Fr. John Murphy was a compassionate and lovable priest from years ago at my former parish. He shared one small part of a story about a time when a woman came to him because she wanted to return to the Church, which she had left when she was very young. At the end of that first conversation, he asked if she might want to say a prayer together. She said she didn't know any prayers. What about the Hail Mary? No, she didn't remember that one from her childhood. What about the Our Father? Sorry, that was just too long ago. Then she perked up: Oh, I think I could recite some of the words of the Lord's Prayer. Fr. Murphy finished the story by saying: "So, I prayed the Our Father while she prayed the Lord's Prayer and everything was just fine."

Today we have, in the Gospel passage, as well as at the heart of the mass itself, the words of that prayer, given to the disciples by Jesus, which, of course, goes by either one of those names. The way today's readings unfold, that prayer is at a kind of climax of references to the Word of God.

#### **Written Word of God**

When we read the Bible, we say we are reading the inspired Word of God. This is the writings of human authors, but with a particular kind of inspiration breathed into it by the Holy Spirit of God. Because of this, we know that even the seeming imperfections or inconsistencies of the biblical account confirm that fallible human beings wrote the words. Yet, there is such a lovely divine perfection in the meaning of those words.

When we hear those words proclaimed, or privately read or study or pray with Sacred Scripture, we are often inspired to live a more holy life, to draw closer in intimacy to our creator. In that way, the Word of God fulfils a purpose in us as we contemplate the greatest love story. It is the story of God's unbounded love for his sons and daughters who open their hearts to his plan of sheer goodness, his plan to share his blessed life with all people.

### **The Old Testament Word of God**

There are so many references to God's word throughout the Old Testament. In this passage from Isaiah, God's word is described as living and active. It is not a thing but the action of God. And that action will not fail in its purpose. It will succeed. We know that today, we are amongst fewer and fewer people who are listening to Word of God. But we can have confidence that God's plan will not be thwarted, that just as the rain falls and waters the earth so it can produce fruit, his Word will succeed.

Just listen to some of the words of Isaiah, Chapter 55: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters ... Incline your ear and come to me. Listen so that you may live ... Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near ... My word, like rain upon the earth, shall not return to me empty.

Psalms 119: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Jeremiah 15: When I found your words, I devoured them. They became the joy and the happiness of my heart, because I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.

Deuteronomy 8, a very good passage for Lent: He humbled you to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

### **The Word Sent Down From Heaven**

Now the bible itself, especially in John's Gospel, is very clear that Jesus IS the Word of God fully revealed. He is everything that the Old Testament was pointing

to. God's Son IS the plan of Salvation, who would come down from heaven, like the rain upon the earth, to restore us to intimacy. He does not fail. He keeps the Father's promise that his word will produce fruit. When Jesus returns to the Father at the Ascension, he has transformed human life and experience and destiny.

### **The Our Father**

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, they are not really looking for words. They already had those: The psalms and the Torah and everything in between. They had spent enough time with him to desire for themselves the intimacy he had with the Father.

With that receptivity, Jesus is able to shower a gentle rain upon them with his revealing of the secret of prayer. Don't use endless words as if you were pagans trying to provoke their useless gods into action on their behalf. Those words just form a heap of emptiness. God already knows your needs. Stop trying to manipulate God. Instead, turn your hearts to him. Let yourself be watered by that warm gentle rain from heaven.

And so, Jesus, the Word of God, gives the disciples, then and through the ages, the words of the Lord's Prayer. In the first three petitions, he asks us to come close and call God Our Father, who invites us into the heavenly experience with him who is in heaven. He shares his holiness with us as we call upon his name in worship.

As we contemplate today the first of the three Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, let us seek intimacy with our God, not with the words of our mouth but with the deepest desire of our hearts. Whether we say the Our Father or the Lord's prayer at the Eucharist today, let us return to him, uniting our hearts to his as we seek today's daily bread for our souls.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *O Lord, you have been our refuge, from generation to generation. From age to age, you are.*

**Isaiah:** *Thus says the Lord, your God: For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth ... so shall my word not return to me empty, but it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

**Psalms:** *I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant. Never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The Lord is near to the broken hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.*

**Gospel Acclamation:** *No one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

**Matthew:** *When the disciples had gathered around him, he began to teach them: When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. For your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way: our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*

**Offertory Prayer:** *Receive, O Creator, almighty God, what we bring from your bountiful goodness.*

**Final Prayer:** *Grant us through these mysteries, Lord, that by moderating earthly desires we may learn to love the things of heaven.*