

Homily
3rd Sunday, St. Paul Newman Center
Jan. 26, 2025

Brothers and sisters, I'm happy to be with you this evening. It's always good to be here at St. Paul Newman Center, and I'm glad to join you for the kickoff of Bison Catholic Week. This really is a light shining here on the campus of NDSU, and it's a beacon for our whole city.

In the gospel we just heard, Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as usual, and he reads from the Scriptures. And after reading a passage from Isaiah, Jesus says, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." I'm sure the people were surprised to hear this, maybe a little confused. What did he mean? Jesus is telling them that everything Isaiah had prophesied was coming to pass, and it was coming to pass not just in a vague, abstract way. It was coming to pass today, and it was coming to pass in him.

When Jesus says "today," he means more than just that twenty-four hour period in that month of that year. He is saying to them that the moment had come, now, today, when God would carry out everything he had promised to them over the centuries. From that moment on, God's grace was at work among them, and it was coming to them now, today. Not tomorrow, not in some distant future, but at this moment. One of our great temptations in this life is to put things off, to delay, to procrastinate. I'll start exercising tomorrow, I'll study later, I'll go to confession next week. But Jesus is telling us the time has come, it is today, it is now.

And here's the other point he makes. The prophecy is coming to fulfillment now, today, and it is coming in the person of Jesus himself. Again, not in an abstract way, not in a philosophy or system, but in a person, in the person standing in front of them, in Jesus of Nazareth. They had known him and seen him grow up. I wonder what they were thinking. Some might have already sensed something remarkable about him. Others were probably put off or scandalized by him. "Who does he think he is?" But the key is that Jesus himself is the fulfillment of God's promises, he is the one God has anointed to bring glad tidings, and to set captives free. He is the one who would save us, not someone else. Jesus isn't just another wise teacher, and he isn't some great military hero, or emperor. He is the One who would bring about the coming of God's Kingdom. And he would fulfill God's plan by bringing God's peace, freedom from sin, and new life out of death. We hear all kinds of strategies for improving our lives, for making the world better, for finding happiness. You probably hear a lot of them here on campus. But Jesus is the One, he is our way to God.

This Third Sunday of the Church year, has been designated by Pope Francis as the Sunday of the Word of God. I guess you could say every Sunday is about God's Word, but today we give special attention to this gift, the Word, the voice of our Lord, especially in the Scriptures. When we read the sacred Scriptures, the Gospels, the letters of Paul, the Old Testament prophets, what are we reading or hearing? Words and stories from the past, from centuries ago? No, it's more than that. The Word of God that we have received isn't just ancient history. It is the voice of God speaking to us now, today. Through his Word, he is present to us, speaking to us, reaching into our hearts and changing our lives, if we'll let him. The Scriptures aren't just a book, like a novel or a mystery or a textbook. They are the communication of God to his people, not just for past

centuries, but also for today. Now I'll admit some passages in the Scriptures can be challenging for us to understand in our twenty-first century. And challenge is good. In fact, God speaks his Word to us to challenge us, to wake us up, to grab our attention and get us to focus on him. Jesus himself is the Word of God, the Word made flesh, who came to us and enters into our lives so that we might live in his. The Word of God changes us, it enters into what we're saying and doing, it illuminates our daily lives, it challenges but it also comforts us. And remember, the Word of God transforms an ordinary day into *the today* in which God speaks to us.

So, my friends, let me make a suggestion. I know many of you are involved in Bible studies. If you don't already do this, start today to read a little passage from the Gospel each day. Keep a copy in your pocket, in your bag, on your nightstand. Fr. Cheney can help you obtain a small copy of the Gospels. Take a moment to read a few verses and let our Lord speak his Word to you. You'll discover very quickly that Jesus speaks to us today, this day, in a very personal way. The Gospel literally fills the day with God's presence. When we get into this habit of reading and listening to the Word of God, he is with us more fully at every moment, and we realize that these words are spoken especially for us, for our lives. Just as surely as Jesus entered that synagogue in Nazareth, so too he enters this church, your home, your heart, wherever you are. He comes to us today, and he offers us his divine life.

In a very real sense, as we participate in Mass this weekend, the Scriptures are "fulfilled in our hearing," just as Jesus said. They are fulfilled *today*, this day that extends to the end of our lives and into eternity. The same Jesus who fulfills all the prophecies speaks to us here and now in the Sacred Scriptures, the Word of God. And that same Jesus comes to us here and now and is truly present to us in the Eucharist, the Word made Flesh. He comes to us in the sacrament of Reconciliation to forgive and heal us, to set us free from sin and death. In the person of Jesus, God enters our lives today. He keeps his promises, he answers our prayers, and he offers us the grace of God's love.