



January 23, 2022

## Third Sunday of Ordinary Time/Sunday of the Word of God

*Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.—response for Psalm 19*

Dear Friends;

Imagine participating in a liturgy that lasted six or seven hours! That is what the people were doing in our first reading from the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was appointed by the king to oversee the restoration of the land of Judah after the people returned from exile. He wanted to make the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) the basic rule of life for this newly repatriated people. Ezra a priest and an expert in the Law of Moses is very good at explaining the Scriptures to the people. The people are moved to tears but Ezra sends them forth to celebrate for *"rejoicing in the Lord will be your strength."*

In the Gospel passage from Luke, Jesus announces the program of his ministry in a synagogue liturgy. The central proclamation Jesus makes is to restore sight to the blind, but not just physical sight. He will bring insight to those who heed his word. He will also free people from bondage to the demons that possess them. And he will restore to people's lives by healing them. He also acknowledges the resistance he will face in his ministry.

Both readings present to us the power of the preached word. The Word of God can change lives but also can be a threat if we are not ready to change. The word can move us to tears when we see ourselves in the stories. The word strengthens us to proclaim the justice of God's radical love. And the Word moves us to act on behalf of the disenfranchised.

Today we celebrate Sunday of the Word of God. We as Catholics in the last sixty years have come to a better appreciation of the importance of the Word of God in our lives. Everything must begin and end in the Word of God, spoken in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Incarnate Word.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (the book used to celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy) tells us, *"When the Sacred Scriptures are read in Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel."* The words of Scripture are not like any other texts we will ever hear. Scripture is the vehicle God uses to communicate himself with us. It is not about getting information. The Scriptures are about forming a relationship with the God who loves us. Through the Word we come to know the depth of that love revealed in Christ. We learn what are the rights and responsibilities of being a follower of Christ and member of his Body.

The Word of God proclaimed in the Eucharistic celebration has a sacramental power to bring about in us what it proclaims. In other words, it not only tells us of God and God's will for us, but it empowers us to put that will of God into practice in our daily lives. How do respond to the Word of God? We listen attentively as it is proclaimed. That means not following along in a book (unless you are hearing impaired). For when the lector, deacon or priest is praising the Scriptures it is Christ himself who speaks to us. We respond in word and song, in silent reflection, in posture and gesture, and in acclaiming *"Thanks be to God!"* or *"Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!"*

Our Sunday Eucharistic celebration is centered on two tables. The first is the table of the Word of God. We are nourished by Risen Christ who speaks his word to us. The word gives us life. The second is the table of the Eucharistic meal of Christ Body and Blood. The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. At the beginning of the liturgy the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar-table. This shows the unity of Scripture and the Eucharist; the table of the Word and the table of Christ's body and blood.

At the time of the Gospel the Book of the Gospels is processed from the altar-table to the ambo. The book is accompanied by incense and candles and is kissed at the conclusion of the reading. All stand attention because Christ himself is speaking to us. The Church in honoring the book pays homage to Christ who is present in his Word and who proclaims the Gospel. Then like Ezra it is the job of the homilist to explain the Word so the assembly can fully comprehend God's call.

Pope Francis writes *"I would like so much for Christians to be able to comprehend 'the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ' through the diligent reading of the Word of God, for the sacred text is nourishment of the soul..."* Today let us renew our commitment to know Christ through the Word of God. Today we will give you a prayer service to take for enthroning the bible in your own home.

Peace!

*Fr Ron*

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