

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



SUNDAY
OF THE
WORD OF GOD

LITURGICAL - PASTORAL RESOURCES - 2022



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Blessed are those who hear the word of God!

(cf. *Lk 11: 28*)

The text chosen by Pope Francis for the *Sunday of the Word of God* is extremely meaningful for the life of the Christian community. The evangelist Luke includes these words of Jesus as the conclusion of a discourse which illustrates the unity between the messianic action of Jesus and his teaching. The chapter opens with the request made by a disciple to teach them to pray just as the Baptist had also done with his disciples. Jesus does not refuse and teaches the most beautiful prayer that Christians have always used to identify themselves in him as children of the one Father. *The Lord's Prayer* is not only the prayer of believers who profess to have, through Jesus, a filial relationship with God; it is also the synthesis of being reborn to a new life where doing the will of the Father is the source of salvation. In a word, it is the synthesis of the entire Gospel. Jesus's words invite those who pray with these expressions to allow themselves to be involved in a 'we' that is indicative of a community: "Say this when you pray" (*Lk 11:2*), and they allow his disciples to experience a deep desire for prayer as an expression of their entire existence. Prayer, therefore, is not just for a moment, but encompasses the Lord's disciples' entire day. It requires the joy

of encounter and perseverance. This is why the Lord continues to say, "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." (*Lk 11:9*). Nothing remains unheard with the Father when it is requested in the name of the Son.

Jesus's teaching, however, is visible in his actions and witness. In this context, the evangelist recounts the story of an exorcism. A man, who had been rendered mute, before the power of Christ, regains his speech. The astonishment and enthusiasm of the crowd does not, however, succeed in curbing the insolence of some who do not challenge Jesus for his thaumaturgical activity, but for its origin: "It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that he casts out devils" (*Lk 11:15*). This is the merciless and deceptive temptation of those who do not intend to welcome into their lives the source of salvation through love, but are determined to remain bound to the law and its works. Jesus's reaction is a further teaching on his divine origin, but at the same time, it is a pressing invitation to those who believe in him not to be overcome by the presence of evil and its servants of violence, because the Kingdom of God is clearly in our midst with its fruits.

All these events lead a woman present to exclaim with conviction, "Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!" (*Lk* 11:27). Jesus doesn't miss the opportunity to reply. Although he lets his mother be praised, he directs the eyes of believers beyond her. With the proclamation of his beatitude (cf. *Lk* 11:28), he unites the hearing of God's word to its implementation. A double horizon opens up before us. On the one hand, Christian existence is characterised by listening to the Word of God. In it, we are offered a meaning so profound that it helps us to understand our presence amidst the world's vicissitudes. There will always be a serious struggle between those who adhere to the Word and those who oppose it. Not adhering to the Word may make Christians more socially acceptable, but will make them insignificant, because in the end they will remain 'mute' and subjugated. They will become like salt that loses its taste and will be trampled on and rejected even by those they have temporarily won over (cf. *Mt* 5:13). This is an illusion to be shunned with conviction so as not to make the Gospel of salvation ineffective. On the other hand, merely listening to the Word of God is not enough. Jesus adds a decisive verb that involves 'holding

on to' this word by its observance. It is constitutive of the Christian proclamation to bear witness to the Word. Keeping the Word is equivalent to making it become like a seed that bears fruit with patient endurance (cf. *Lk* 8:15). Its effectiveness, however, does not depend so much on personal commitment as on the power that flows from that divine Word.

The Word of God, therefore, is transformed into the 'Will of God' and the 'Will of God' becomes his Word that works salvation. The Christian community, therefore, becomes the privileged place where one can listen to and live by this Word, because in the community, Christians are truly brothers and sisters who support one another by living in love. The *Sunday of the Word of God*, as we can see, once again allows Christians to reaffirm Jesus's steadfast invitation to listen to and cherish his Word in order to offer today's world a witness of hope that will enable it to go beyond the difficulties of the present moment.

✠ Rino Fisichella



The Word of God in the Community

In order to facilitate hearing the Word of God, consideration should be given to measures which can help focus the attention of the faithful.... Special attention should be given to the ambo as the liturgical space from which the Word of God is proclaimed.

(Verbum Domini 68)

Some Practical Points

In view of the present situation with the pandemic, it is recommended that organisers of the *Sunday of the Word of God* continuously monitor the current health regulations in order to adapt the community's initiatives and conduct accordingly.

In order to live fruitfully the *Sunday of the Word of God* in community, it is essential to prepare it well in advance. Preparations should range from the spiritual level (personal and communal prayer for the event's success and for the openness of our hearts to the Word of God) to the material level (adequate planning that corresponds to the life and possibilities of one's own community).

Here are some suggested steps:

ENTRUST THE INITIATIVE TO A COORDINATING GROUP

The first step to be taken is to entrust the initiative to a group of people capable of managing and coordinating the implementation of this Sunday's pastoral initiatives. The task of this group of people could be:

- praying for its success;
- planning the various initiatives (presenting proposals according to

different age groups, thinking of events with a biblical, cultural and historical character);

- choosing other suitable people for the practical implementation of the day's activities;
- estimating possible expenses;
- preparing the necessary materials;
- communicating information about this Sunday's events;
- reaching out to people in need (the housebound, those in nursing homes, in hospitals, in prisons, etc.);
- involving, as much as possible, people of other religions and Christian denominations, as well as non-believers.

PREPARE SPIRITUALLY

It is useful to remember, first of all, that the Bible is not just a text of high cultural, moral, historical, social or artistic value, capable of inspiring today's men and women. The Bible contains within itself the Word of God which is "alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts." (*Heb 4:12*).

In order to encounter the living Word, it is necessary to focus above all on the spiritual preparation, asking for openness of heart for ourselves and for those to whom it will be proclaimed during the *Sunday of the Word of God*. Consequently, preparations for planning the initiative necessarily require that we begin with personal and communal prayer.

Communities, at least one week before the *Sunday of the Word of God*, could include in the Prayer of the Faithful a petition dedicated to the success of this initiative.

Members of the coordinating group, together with catechists, pastoral workers, evangelisers and other people responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel, could plan a time of silent Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, offered for the events of the *Sunday of the Word of God*.

SCHEDULE ACTIVITIES

The different activities planned for this initiative should address both the community as well as individuals, remembering always that the Word of God is living and that its cultural value has multiple connotations.

INVOLVE THE FAITHFUL

Information regarding the *Sunday of the Word of God* requires early communication in order to reach as many people as possible.

Undoubtedly, a personal invitation is the most direct way to inform people of this initiative.

Flyers and brochures can also be easily distributed to people and posted on bulletin boards.

Social media platforms such as *Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp* and other apps should be used to spread widely all planned activities.

LIVE THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

It is important to foster both a personal and communal encounter with the *living Word*.

We are called to become instruments in the hands of the Lord and to remember that “as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying



out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.” (Is 55:10-11).

CONTINUE EXPERIENCING THE WORD OF GOD

After this specific Sunday, it is necessary to remember that the Word of God does not cease to work in our hearts, so it would be appropriate to create formative opportunities (for example: weekly or monthly *Lectio Divina*, Bible groups, etc.) where the encounter with the Word of God can continue, offering possibilities for the ongoing formation of the faithful.

The following are some pastoral proposals that can help emphasise the importance of celebrating the *Sunday of the Word of God* in the Christian community. Depending on the context of each community, besides others, these can be proposed: celebrating the Institution of Readers by the diocesan bishop; the continuous proclamation/reading of a book in the Bible; the distribution of Bibles in certain places (like hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, schools, etc.); audio-plays or podcasts based on biblical characters; educative and formative events; ecumenical celebrations, etc.





Welcoming the Word of God in the Community

A *Rite for Enthronement of the Word of God* is proposed, which may be more appropriate, especially in light of the changing epidemiological situation caused by the pandemic. However, at the discretion of the local bishop and the parish priest, other elements may be introduced that emphasise the importance of the Word of God in the celebrating community – in conformity, of course, with the liturgical directives in force regarding the celebration of the sacraments and, above all, of the Holy Eucharist.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the *Rite of Enthronement* given here is a proposal, and should not be applied rigidly to the liturgy being celebrated, without taking into account the particular needs that may be present in a parish or diocesan community.

It is desirable that the *Rite of Enthronement* take place at least once and during the *Sunday of the Word of God's* most important or solemn Eucharistic celebration.

Next to the altar, or at the ambo, or in another expressly prepared place (a chapel), arrange a place visible to the entire assembly, elevated and decorated, where the Sacred Text can be placed.

The Holy Mass begins as usual – a solemn procession with the thurible, the boat, the cross and the candles, carrying the Book of the Gospels according to the local liturgical custom, should be encouraged, if possible.

PENITENTIAL ACT

After the initial greeting the *Rite of Enthronement* is introduced with these or similar words:

“This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen” – thus said the Lord to the inhabitants of Nazareth. In this way, Jesus reminds us that the Word of God is dynamic. It is not a book that, once read, is closed and placed on a shelf; rather it is a living presence capable of transforming and sanctifying our lives. Opening the Bible means personally encountering God who turns to each one of us, personally, and reveals himself and makes known his presence in our lives.

Today the Church celebrates the *Sunday of the Word of God*: let us open ourselves to the presence of God who, through his Word, wishes to reveal himself to us and dwell in the midst of our lives.

So that we may welcome his presence during this celebration, let us now ask for the forgiveness of our sins.

This is followed by the penitential act, which could be as follows:

- C. The Lord Jesus, who invites us to the table of the Word and of the Eucharist, calls us to conversion; let us acknowledge that we are sinners and confidently invoke God's mercy.
- C. Lord Jesus, you are the Word of God made flesh, *Kyrie eleison*.
- R. *Kyrie eleison*.
- C. Lord Jesus, you restored sight to the blind by the power of your word, *Christe eleison*.
- R. *Christe eleison*.
- C. Lord Jesus, you free our lives from sin, *Kyrie eleison*.
- R. *Kyrie eleison*.
- C. May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.
- R. Amen.

The Gloria is sung and then the Liturgy of the Word begins as usual.

ENTHRONEMENT

For the proclamation of the Gospel, the Book of the Gospels is carried in procession from the altar to the ambo, where it is incensed. At the end of the Gospel reading, the minister, after kissing the Sacred Text, takes it to

the throne in procession, where it is placed, opened and incensed.

A commentator explains the gesture in these or similar words:

The book containing the Word of God is solemnly carried and placed on the throne. It is a symbolic gesture. Through it, we not only exalt the Sacred Scripture in the midst of this praying community of ours, but also manifest our willingness to place it first in our lives. Thus, the Word of God becomes the beacon of our existence that illuminates our decisions and inspires our actions according to God's will.

The homily and the Holy Mass follow as usual.

THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER OR PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

The following Prayer of the Faithful could be used, modifying it according to the needs of the local community:

- C. Brothers and sisters, in Jesus Christ the Holy Scriptures are fulfilled and our lives find their completeness. Let us present our intentions to God the Father, so that we may fully live out his Word.
- L. Let us pray together and say the response: *May your Word be fulfilled in us, O Father!*



1. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.” May the Holy Father, bishops, priests, and deacons courageously support all those who live in situations of spiritual and material slavery. We pray to the Lord...

2. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me... to bring the good news to the poor”. May all the baptised, guided by the Holy Spirit, become heralds of the Good News to the people they encounter in their daily lives, especially those most in need. We pray to the Lord...



3. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me...to proclaim liberty to captives”. May lectors, catechists and those who spread the Word of God in communities share faith, hope and love with all those who are lonely, desperate, sick and crushed by the burden of life. We pray to the Lord...

4. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me...to proclaim...to the blind new sight”. May each of us open our hearts to the divine presence that enlightens us through his Word and guides us to the springs of eternal life. We pray to the Lord...

C. We thank you, O Father, for your Son whom you sent among us. Grant that with the grace of the Holy Spirit we may welcome him into our hearts, you who live and reign forever and ever.

R. Amen.

PRAYERS OVER THE PEOPLE

The celebration may be concluded with the following blessing:

C. May God bless you with every heavenly blessing, make you pure and holy in his sight; may he pour out upon you the riches of his glory, instruct you with the words of truth, enlighten you with the Gospel of salvation, and make you glad in fraternal charity.

R. Amen.

C. And may the blessing of almighty God, Father and Son ✠ and Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you forever.

R. Amen.



Lectio Divina for the Community on the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

PREPARATION FOR LISTENING (STATIO)

Let us prepare ourselves to listen wholeheartedly to the Word that is given to us. Sometimes our good will is not enough, we are caught up in so much anxiety and distress, disturbed by negative thoughts, worries and concerns. Let us place ourselves as we are before the Lord, in communion with all our brothers and sisters regenerated by the incorruptible seed of the living Word (cf. *1 P* 1:23). Let us invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is “blessed” because she fully believed the Word (cf. *Lk* 1:41-45). May we too, with the grace of the Spirit, accept the Word in faith, give it flesh in our lives and proclaim it joyfully as the Word that saves.

Let us pray

Come Holy Spirit, living communion of the Father and the Son. Come, Creator Spirit, you who spoke through the Prophets and conceived the Word in the Virgin. Come, you who descended upon Jesus at his baptism and consecrated him to announce the Good News to the poor, to free the oppressed and bring joy and salvation to all. Come to us as a balm for our

wounds, come sweet consoler, give us a new heart, capable of listening and of tenderness. Teach us to know how to listen humbly to one another; teach us to know how to forgive one another and to open ourselves to receive your newness in the history we are living. Teach us to recognise your presence in what happens to us. Teach us to recognise the Word made flesh in every brother and sister, especially in the little ones, the poor, the afflicted and the despised. We praise you and thank you for summoning us today to listen to your Word. Amen.



**PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD
OF GOD: LUKE 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eye witnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how

well founded the teaching is that you have received.

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:





"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'.

PRAYERFUL READING (LECTIO)

First of all, let us try to 'enter into' into the scene described by the evangelist, using our imagination. This is known as the *compositio loci* (the geography or place). We are not afraid to use our imagination; St Ignatius of Loyola invites us to use it to involve ourselves fully in contemplation. Although those who have been on a pilgrimage to Nazareth can activate their memory, all of us can nevertheless close our eyes for a moment and imagine ourselves inside the synagogue of Nazareth, that place frequented by Jesus from childhood, where he was catechised and grew up listening to the Scriptures.

It is not just any day, it is the Sabbath, the holiday, and the people

are gathered for the community's liturgical prayer.

There is great expectation, what will Jesus say?

Let us read and read again the text without haste, like good food that must be tasted and savoured, like spring water that quenches the soul.

MEDITATING OR REFLECTING (MEDITATIO)

Let us enter into a prayerful dialogue with the Word we have heard, as did Mary of Nazareth who kept the words concerning Jesus, "pondered them in her heart." (cf. *Lk* 2:19, 51). Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the Word: what does it say today in my life, in our family, in our community? Let us try to address this question more concretely by pondering on some specific aspects of the text and from the context of Luke's Gospel.

The context: guided by the Holy Spirit

The context of Luke 3:21-4:15 allows us to grasp a profound link between baptism, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the mission of Jesus, the beloved Son who allows himself to be fully guided by the Spirit who, in turn, leads him first of all into the desert (*Lk* 4:1) and then returns him to Galilee, after

successfully overcoming the temptations: “Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee” (Lk 4:14). The whole activity of Jesus unfolds in full docility to the Spirit and in the same perspective Luke will see the mission of the Church, baptised in the Spirit of Pentecost, unfold. In fact, it is not simply Peter and the Apostles who decide what to do, but “the Holy Spirit and by ourselves” (Ac 15:28); and it is not simply Paul and his companions who decide the way of evangelisation, but “the Spirit of Jesus” who manifests himself in sometimes unfavourable situations (cf. Ac 16:7). Following Jesus “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1), the baptised are called to be “guided by the Spirit” (Ga 5:16), to allow themselves to be guided in everything by the Spirit. We can then ask ourselves: *how do we live our relationship with the Holy Spirit that we have received in our baptism and Confirmation? Are our choices and plans preceded by prayer and discernment in the Spirit?* Pope Francis exhorts us to be *Spirit-filled Evangelisers*, “fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit” (EG 259).

Within the heart of the liturgy

We are in the heart of the Sabbath morning liturgy. When Jesus gets up

in the synagogue of Nazareth to do the prophetic reading, the reading of the Torah and the prayers included in the first part of the rite are supposed to have already been done. It is in the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah that Jesus finds the foundational scriptural passage of his mission. However, the evangelist Luke surprises us because the quoted passage is not found as such in the Bible; it is not a literal quotation, but an interweaving of different passages with significant omissions.

The quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 incorporates a well known expression from Isaiah 58:6 that reinforces the theme of liberation and omits instead the second part of Isaiah 61:2 that announces “a day of vengeance for our God”. He deliberately stops at the first part of the verse that proclaims “the year of the Lord’s favour”. It is the Jubilee, a time of grace and mercy, a time of joy and fraternity, a sabbatical year which provides for the remission of debts and the rest of the land which will again be given to the poor (cf. Lv 25:10). Who knows how many times the Jewish faithful heard and prayed these prophetic words that announce grace, mercy, justice and fraternity. We note that the prophetic text speaks directly, not in the third person but in the first person: “The spirit of the



Lord has been given to me for he has anointed me. He has sent me..." But of whom does the Prophet speak, "is the prophet referring to himself or someone else?" (cf. Ac 8:34).

The "today" of Jesus

Moments of silence, everyone is holding his or her breath. Jesus rerolls the scroll (*it is he who opens it, it is he who closes it*), hands it back to the attendant and sits down (*the reading is done standing, the homily seated*). Everyone's eyes are on him. What will he say in the homily? However, Jesus does not preach, he does not comment on the text, he declares instead its fulfilment: "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." (*Lk 4:21*). Jesus himself is the fulfilment of the Scripture, he is the one consecrated with the anointing of the Spirit, sent to bring the Good News to the poor. He is the 'jubilee' who forgives debts, sets prisoners free, makes the poor rejoice and 'mother earth' breathe, she too is in need of rest and liberation.

In the synagogue of Nazareth the verb of fulness resounds: "This text is being fulfilled today" (*peplērōtai*). It is the same verb that in Mark's Gospel inaugurates Jesus's preaching, "The time has come" (*peplērōtai*, *Mk 1:15*). The time of the promise opens to the

"today" of Jesus, a "today" that runs through the entire Gospel of Luke, from Bethlehem to the cross: "Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you", the angel tells the shepherds (2:11); "Today salvation has come to this house", Jesus tells Zacchaeus (19:9); "Today you will be with me in Paradise", Jesus answers the evildoer crucified with him (23:43).

From seeing to hearing. Note the shift from 'eyes' to 'ears'. The faithful present in the synagogue wanted to see ("And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him."), but Jesus leads them back to the biblical primacy of *listening*: "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen". Today we too are challenged to move from the curiosity of *seeing* to the faith that comes from *listening* to the Word (cf. *Rm 10:17*). Let us therefore activate the 'beatitude of listening'! Only those who listen to the Word with faith, with all their hearts and with all their lives, will be able to be its witnesses and credible heralds.

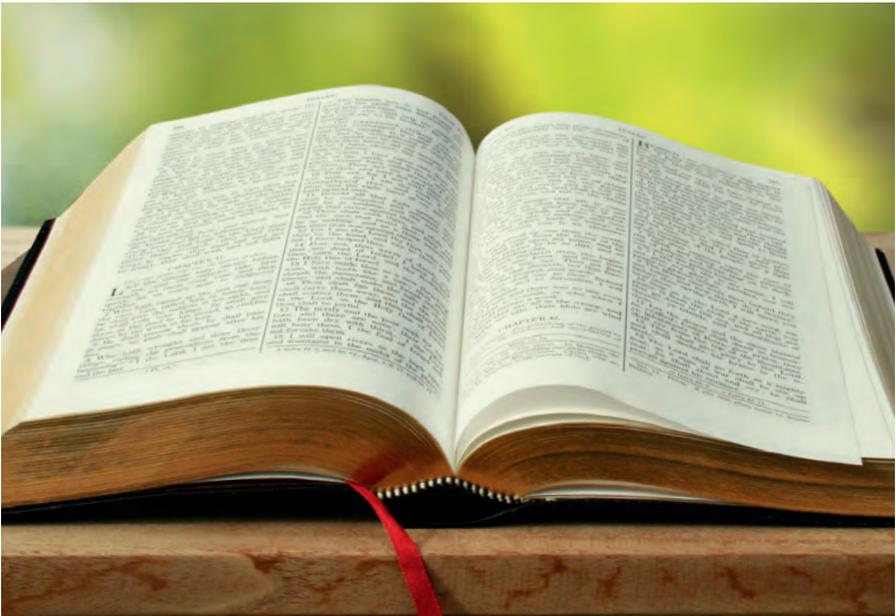
A word of joy and liberation

In the passage following we notice that the first reaction of the faithful in the synagogue of Nazareth after hearing the words of Jesus is wonder: "And he won the approval of all, and

they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.” (*Lk* 4:22a). The Gospel is good news, it is contagious joy that flows from the heart of Christ, it is consolation and profound liberation that comes from loving and letting oneself be loved, from giving and forgiving, from taking care of others, especially the most fragile and needy, with deep respect and acceptance of diversity, with responsibility and tenderness.

The “jubilee” that Jesus came to inaugurate does not leave those who want to follow him, men and women, indifferent. It is a jubilee

that awakens hearts and minds, that opens eyes to injustice, to situations of poverty ignored, to the painful and unsustainable situations of so many brothers and sisters, to the wounds that are continually being inflicted on mother earth. It is not superficial joy or selfish joy which allows itself to be closed in narrow circles, reserved for a privileged few. The joy of the Gospel is mixed with the tears of the poor and the suffering, it does not tolerate abuse and violence, and it challenges hypocrisy and every form of oppression, even religious oppression: “‘Alas for you lawyers also,’ he replied





'because you load on men burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift.'" (*Lk* 11:46). The Gospel of Jesus is essentially liberation: "Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness" (*EG* 1). Liberation and joy not only for humans, who are called to be "brothers and sisters", but also for mother earth, which has the right to a sabbatical to rest and regenerate, a year of grace in which debtors can breathe because their debts will be forgiven and the poor can rejoice because they too will be granted a portion of the earth, as is only right.

A word that enlightens and heals

To the messengers sent by John the Baptist, who in prison was experiencing doubts about the messianic identity of Jesus, the Lord responded by letting the signs of the gospel speak for themselves, attesting to the fulfilment of the Prophet's words: "Then he gave the messengers their answer, 'Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor'" (*Lk* 7:22; cf. *Is* 26:19; 35: 5-6; 42:7; 61:1). Light for the blind, a

swift walk rather than a limp, because the Lord renews strength, "he makes my feet as light as a doe's, he sets my steps on the heights." says the Prophet (*Hab* 3:19).

The image of light is frequently associated with the Word in the Bible: "Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path." (*Ps* 118:105). Christ himself is the Word that enlightens, he is "the true light that enlightens all men" (*Jn* 1:9). Whoever listens to his word is delivered from darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light. With Jesus's preaching to the Gentiles in Galilee the light dawns: "The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light; on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death a light has dawned." (*Mt* 4:16). Is not ignorance of God and his love the deepest darkness? Those regenerated in Christ have passed from darkness into the splendid light of the One who called them for a specific mission: to proclaim the gospel, to proclaim the wonderful works of the Lord (cf. *1 P* 2:9).

How alive in us is the awareness that we are bearers of a light that does not come from us, but from the Word that has 'renewed us' for a brotherly love without hypocrisy? (cf. 1P 1:22-25). How do we live the gospel of fraternity?

A word that encourages and consoles

In the Bible the expression “to evangelise”, that is to “bring the good news”, appears for the first time against the background of the exodus from Babylon, and is closely linked to the theme of consolation. The Lord says: “Console my people, console them’ says your God. ‘Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that her time of service is ended... Go up on a high mountain, joyful messenger to Zion. Shout with a loud voice, joyful messenger to Jerusalem.” (*Is* 40:1-2, 9). Each of us is called to be a messenger of good news. We can do this using social media, with a message of joy and hope, but we are called to do more, to make ourselves a message that ‘speaks to the heart’, that brings encouragement and comfort. The Prophet says, “the LORD... has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken” (*Is* 61:1). Today the world is full of men and women, children, young and old who suffer inwardly, their souls are broken, their hearts are torn. There are those who have never seen peace since they were born, but only war, hunger and misery. The pandemic has expanded suffering and fear, anguish and loneliness. We are sent to console and encourage, tenderly to ‘bind up’

the wounds of the heart, with anointing and spiritual balm. The Apostle Paul invites us to console one another, with the same consolation with which we are consoled by God, “a gentle Father and the God of all consolation” (cf. *2 Co* 1:3-5). If we welcome the consolation that comes to us from God through his Word, we can in turn console with the words and feelings of God who cares for each of his creatures. Pope Francis tells us that “caring is a golden rule of our nature as human beings, and brings with it health and hope” and that “we must also extend this care to our common home: to the earth and to every creature. All forms of life are interconnected and our health depends on that of the ecosystems that God created and entrusted to us to care for” (*General Audience*, Wednesday 16th September 2020).

**PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION
(ORATIO E CONTEMPLATIO)**

After having listened to and meditated on the Gospel passage, let us make room for prayer and contemplation. It is not a matter of saying a few prayers, but rather of ‘praying’ the Word we have heard and meditated upon so that we may implement it in our lives.



- Let us ask the Father to make us savour the joy of being his sons and daughters. Let us thank him for having given us the ‘anointing’ of the Spirit through which we too are ‘other Christs’ we are ‘christified’.
- Let us thank the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and cries within us “Abba, Father!” (cf. *Rm* 8:15).
- Let us ask Jesus to give us his sentiments, his passion for the Gospel and for the people of God, especially for the last, the poor, the little ones, the tired and lost sheep.
- Let us allow the Word to reach the depths of our hearts and warm them.



With St Bernard of Clairvaux, a great master of the spiritual life, venerated as a saint also by the Anglican and Lutheran churches, we ask that the Word be made flesh in our lives:

“Let it not be a word that passes quickly as soon as it is spoken, but a word conceived to abide, clothed in flesh and not in fleeting air! May

it not be a word written and mute, but incarnate and living; not a word engraved in fixed characters on a dead parchment, but printed in human form in my chaste bosom; traced not by a pen, but by the work of the Holy Spirit!”

DISCERNMENT AND ACTION (*DELIBERATIO E ACTIO*)

The dynamic of the Word does not stop on Mount Tabor! That is to say, although contemplation is the summit of *Lectio Divina*, it needs to be mixed with history, to become ‘action’, that is, transforming action. *Contemplatives in action!* From the mountain of contemplation or transfiguration, we come down with Jesus to ‘take care’ of our brothers and sisters, of mother earth and of every creature, proclaiming the gospel with our lives. In this perspective, *what concrete choice, what decision does the Word urge me to make? What does it ask of me “today” so that the joy of the Gospel can live in me and permeate the world?*



The Words of the Fathers of the Church

In the present edition, we give voice to St Augustine of Hippo. He was born in Tagaste on 13th November 354 and died in Hippo on 28th August 430. He is considered the 'Doctor of Grace' and defender of the faith in the face of the Manichean, Donatist, and Pelagian heresies. Below is his commentary on some verses of Psalm 18, which will be proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C.

ST AUGUSTINE'S COMMENTARY

The revelation of Christ

(Psalm 18/19:8, 9, 10, 11, 15)

"The law of the Lord is perfect, it revives the soul." He himself is the Law of the Lord, because he came to fulfil the Law, not to abrogate it; And an immaculate Law because he committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth, and he does not crush souls under the yoke of servitude, but converts them into freedom to the imitation of himself. *"The rule of the Lord is to be trusted, it gives wisdom to the simple."* *"The rule of the Lord is to be trusted"*, for no one has known the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son has willed to reveal him; these things are

hidden from the wise and revealed to children, for God resists the proud while he gives grace to the humble.

"The precepts of the Lord are right, they gladden the heart." All the precepts of the Lord are righteous in him, who taught nothing that he did not do himself, so that those who imitate him may rejoice in their hearts at those things, which they do freely out of love and not abjectly out of fear. *"The command of the Lord is clear; it gives light to the eyes."* Indeed, *"The command of the Lord is clear"* for without the veil of carnal obsessions it enlightens the inner face of man.

"The fear of the Lord is holy, abiding for ever." *"The fear of the Lord"* is not that which is placed under the law of punishment and which is terrified that temporal goods will be taken away from it, in a type of love that soils the soul; but that pure one with which the Church, the more ardently she loves her spouse, the more diligently she fears to offend him; and therefore perfect love does not drive away this fear which instead remains eternally.

"The decrees of the Lord are truth and all of them just." The judgements (statutes) of him who judges no one, but has given his Son all

power to judge, are without doubt unchangeably righteous. For God has neither deceived anyone in threatening or promising, nor can anyone take away from the wicked the torment, or from the pious the reward which he gives.

“They are more to be desired than gold, than the purest of gold.” However much gold and stones are precious and desirable, yet the judgements of God are more desirable than the pomps of this age, whose aspirations causes the judgements of God not to be desired, but feared or despised or not believed. And if anyone is himself or herself gold or a precious stone, so that they are not consumed by fire but are taken up into the treasury of God, then they desire more than desiring themselves the judgements of God, whose will they put before their own.

“Sweeter are they than honey, than honey from the comb.” And whether one is already honey, in that, already free from the bonds of this life, one awaits the day when one may come to the banquet of God; or whether one is still a honeycomb, that is, wrapped up in this life as in wax, not mingled with it but filled with it, and in need of a certain pressure of the hand of God, which does not

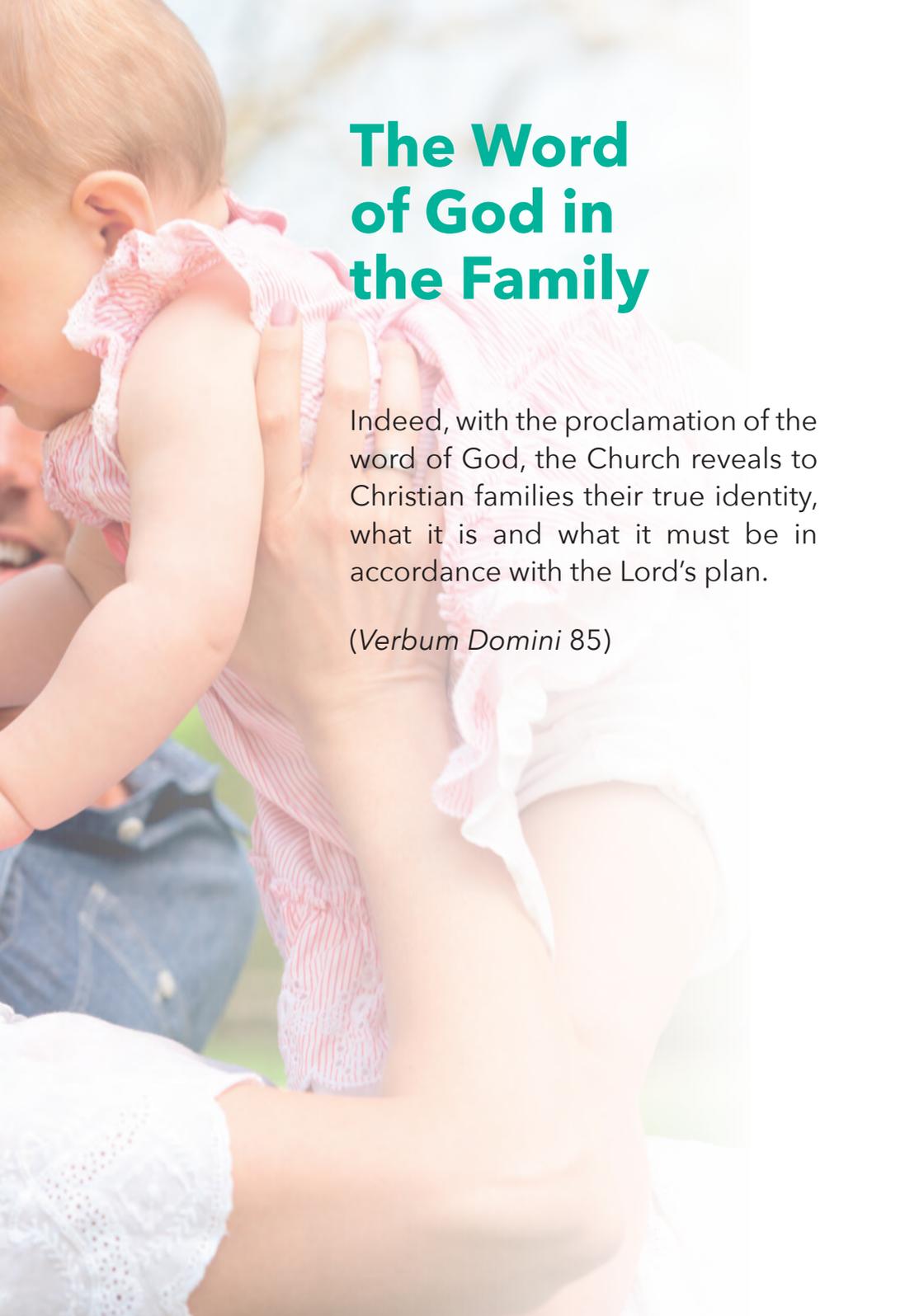
oppress but draws out, in order to pass purified from the temporal life to the eternal life; well, for one such as this, the judgements of God are sweeter than themselves, because for them, God’s statutes, are sweeter than honey and honeycomb.

“May the spoken words of my mouth, the thoughts of my heart, win favour in your sight.” The meditation of my heart is not for the purpose of pleasing others, because pride is already annihilated; but it is always before you, because you scrutinise the pure conscience.

“O Lord, my rescuer, my rock!” Lord, you help me who strive towards you; for you have redeemed me so that I may strive towards you; let no one attribute it to their wisdom to turn to you, or to their own strength to reach you, lest they be further repelled by you, who resist the proud; for they have not purified themselves from great sin, nor do they find favour with you, who redeem us, and help us, so that we may turn, so that we may reach you.

Commentary on Psalm 18/19,
Exposition I.





The Word of God in the Family

Indeed, with the proclamation of the word of God, the Church reveals to Christian families their true identity, what it is and what it must be in accordance with the Lord's plan.

(Verbum Domini 85)

Welcoming the Word of God into the Family

On the Sunday of the Word of God, the entire family gathers around the main table in their home, where the crucifix, a picture of Our Lady, a candle, and the Bible are placed. One of the family members lights the candle and says:
The Light of Christ.

Everyone responds:
Let us give thanks to God.



Then another person introduces the prayer to the Holy Spirit with these words:

We gather around the Word of God to hear the voice of the Lord in our lives and to illuminate our actions with his light. Let us open our hearts to the presence of God, let us invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to understand God's Word and to put it into practice.

Afterwards, the following prayer of St Paul VI is recited (it can be divided and recited by more than one person):

Come, O Holy Spirit
and give me a pure heart
ready to love Christ the Lord
with the fulness, depth and joy
that you alone know how to give.

Give me a heart as pure
like that of a child
that does not know evil
except to fight it and flee from it.

Come, O Holy Spirit
and give me a big heart
open to your inspiring Word
and closed to every petty ambition.

Give me a big and strong heart
capable of loving everyone

determined to endure for them every trial, boredom and weariness, every disappointment and offence.

Give me a big and strong heart
persevering in sacrifice,
happy only to beat with the heart
of Christ
and able humbly, faithfully and
courageously to do the will of God.

All respond:
Amen.

A family member takes the Bible, opens it, and reads the following passage: Luke 19:1-10: “The encounter of Jesus with Zacchaeus” saying first:

LET US LISTEN TO THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE:

He entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who

was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: ‘Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.’ And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. ‘He has gone to stay at a sinner’s house’ they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, ‘Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated any body I will pay him back four times the amount’. And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost’.

All members of the family make a gesture of veneration to the Sacred Scripture. This is followed by a moment of silence, meditation on the text just heard and personal prayer.

Faith sharing

Afterwards, those present can share their reflections on the Word of God they have just heard. To facilitate sharing, here are some questions to consider:

- What part of the passage struck me the most and why?



- Which person in the biblical story do I identify with?
- What behaviour or situation caught my attention?
- Did I experience any emotions during the reading? Which ones and when?
- How does this passage relate to my life?
- Do I feel inspired by the words I have heard?

If the faith sharing part is omitted, the following commentary can be read:

Today's Gospel (cf. *Lk* 19: 1-10) places us in the footsteps of Jesus, who, on his way to Jerusalem, stopped in Jericho. There was a great crowd to welcome him, including a man named Zacchaeus, the head of the "publicans", that is, of those Jews who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman Empire. He was rich not from honest earnings, but because he asked for "bribes", and this increased contempt for him. Zacchaeus "was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was" (v. 3); he did not want to meet him, but he was curious: he wanted to see that personality about whom he had heard extraordinary things. He was curious. And being short in stature, "to catch a glimpse of Jesus" (v. 4) he climbs up a

tree. When Jesus comes close, he looks up and sees him (cf. v. 5).

And this is important: the first glance is not from Zacchaeus, but from Jesus, who among the many faces that surrounded him – the crowd – seeks precisely that one. The merciful gaze of the Lord reaches us before we ourselves realise that we need it in order to be saved. And with this gaze of the divine Master there begins the miracle of the sinner's conversion. Indeed, Jesus calls to him, and he calls him by his name: "Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today." (v. 5). He does not reproach him, he does not deliver a 'sermon' to him; he tells Zacchaeus that he must go to him: "he must", because it is the will of the Father. Despite the murmuring of the people, Jesus chose to stay at the home of that public sinner.

We too would have been scandalised by this behaviour of Jesus. However, contempt for and rejection of sinners only isolate them and cause them to harden in the evil they commit against themselves and the community. Instead, God condemns sin, but tries to save the sinner; he goes looking for them to bring them back on the right path. Those who have never felt they are sought by

God's mercy find it difficult to grasp the extraordinary greatness of the gestures and words with which Jesus approaches Zacchaeus.

Jesus's acceptance and attention lead Zacchaeus to a clear change of mentality; in just a moment, he realised how petty life is when it revolves around money, at the cost of stealing from others and receiving their contempt. Having the Lord there, in his house, makes Zacchaeus see everything with different eyes, even with a little of the tenderness with which Jesus looked at him. And his way of seeing and using money also changes: the gesture of grabbing is replaced by that of giving. Indeed, Zacchaeus decides to give half of what he possesses to the poor and to return four times the sum to those from whom he has stolen (cf. v. 8). Zacchaeus discovers from Jesus that it is possible to love gratuitously: until this moment, he was callous, but now he becomes generous; he had a taste for amassing wealth, now he rejoices in distributing. By encountering Love, by discovering that he is loved despite his sins, Zacchaeus becomes capable of loving others, making money becomes a sign of solidarity and communion.

May the Virgin Mary obtain for us the grace always to feel Jesus's

merciful gaze upon us, to go with mercy towards those who have erred, so that they too may welcome Jesus, who "came to seek out and save what was lost" (v. 10).

Pope Francis, *Angelus*,
3rd November 2019

After the commentary, everyone recites the Lord's Prayer together:

Our Father...

At the end of the prayer, the person who lit the candle takes the Bible and makes the sign of the cross, blessing the whole family with the Scripture.

May God's blessing descend upon us and remain with us forever.

All respond:

Amen.

The candle is blown out, saying:

Stay with us, Lord, now and all the days of our lives.

All respond:

Amen.

Lectio Divina for the Family on the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

PREPARATION FOR LISTENING (STATIO)

It has been two years since everything changed due to the threat caused by the current pandemic, years in which we have experienced many tensions due to the tragic global situation. The rapid spread of the coronavirus has altered everything. This plague has radically changed the way we live our daily lives because of all the prevention measures imposed by the health and government authorities. We need to maintain protocols to protect each other: we need to keep the right distance, use surgical masks, continuously wash our hands with soap and water, avoid assemblies of people, etcetera, etc. “*Stay home*” has been an oft-repeated phrase.

We already have the vaccine, which has been given to most of the world's population. However, new outbreaks and new variants of the virus have emerged despite the measures taken. This has created greater uncertainty for everyone. We cannot shake hands, hug or kiss, especially when we think that those close to us may be asymptomatic carriers of the virus with the risk of being infected and infecting others. We need to regain the confidence lost to this disease.

In light of this situation, let us ask ourselves: *how can we continue working for the building of the Kingdom of God, despite the negative consequences that the Covid-19 pandemic has left in the lives and hearts of so many people: sadness, poverty, marginalisation and distrust?*



As a Church, we have the task of supporting all people: children, adolescents, youth, adults, the elderly, migrants, the sick, brothers and sisters in extreme poverty, those justly or unjustly imprisoned, and those without jobs. All of us who are on a pilgrimage in this world must seek to re-establish fraternal, supportive and respectful

relationships among all, with creation and with God; always enlightened by his Word, which produces joy and commitment in those who hear it. In this context of uncertainty and distrust, it is important to continue to cultivate these forms of relationship, encouraging ourselves, as we have done so far, with Sacred Scripture.





PRAYERFUL READING (LECTIO)

The text to meditate on this Sunday dedicated to the Word of God is taken from the Gospel of Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21. Let us listen carefully and make it our own. Let us take our Bibles in our hands and read it slowly:

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received.

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, ‘This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen’.

Deeper understanding of the text

- The Gospel passage for the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, which Pope Francis established as the *Sunday of the Word of God*, contains important teachings proposed to us by Jesus. We recall that the Gospel of St Luke is classified as the *Gospel of Mercy*, of compassion. In it, Jesus approaches children, young people, the sick, the marginalised, and sinners; in it, God’s merciful face and his tender love for those without fortune and love are revealed. The Good News for the weary and oppressed people of all times!
- From the narrative point of view, this text is found in the second part of the Gospel known as ‘Jesus’s

Activity in Galilee' in the section entitled 'Jesus's Manifestation and Rejection'. Here, Jesus manifests his identity through actions and words. The leaders of Israel reject him. Despite this, he gathers around him a group of disciples whom he will send out to preach.

- Now we move to the structural level. The text we are meditating on today is found in the introductory part of Luke's Gospel (1:1-4), after which Jesus's genealogy is presented (3:23-38) and then Jesus's temptations in the desert (4:1-13). Immediately *after* the section we are meditating on, we find the passage in which the people admire him for the wise words that came out of his mouth. Then, Jesus alludes to the proverbs: 'physician heal thyself' and 'no one is a prophet in his own land.' Finally, the people wanted to throw him off the mountain, but he withdraws to heal the sick and in fact heals a demoniac (4:22-37).

Note: It is recommended to have the Bible at hand to see where this section of the Gospel is placed and to teach the children or youth in the family, in a pedagogical way, how to frame a biblical text.

- It is worth considering that the Gospel of Luke offers us some guidance for the interpretation of this text so that the 'missionary evangelising process', which Jesus is about to undertake, is clear and understandable to all. It is the beginning of his ministry; his words hint at the horizon towards which his message is projected. His disciples are already with him; they will be his faithful witnesses and will help him to spread the *New Kingdom*. He has already revealed his messianic origin through his genealogy. Everything is ready to trigger the *new evangelising process*.
- This scene represents what Jesus is going to accomplish in his ministry, his 'programme' and at the same time the announcement of what the path of the Church will have to be and the way in which this task will need to be carried out.

In the present context, it is important to recognise that the meaning Jesus gives to these teachings is like a *new crucible of hope and longing*. It is a great catechesis, to understand what the Lord wants us to live, addressed to Christians coming from second-generation paganism.



MEDITATING OR REFLECTING (*MEDITATIO*), (WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY TO ME?)

This second moment leads us to discover what the Holy Spirit wants to communicate to those who participate in the reflection on the Word of God. We are invited to reread the text and give a personal response. Recall that this step is about ‘making the Word our own.’ *What does the text say? What does it say about my life?*

Elements for personal reflection

We recall that Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter *Aperuit Illis*, published on 30th September 2019, in memory of St Jerome on the 1600th anniversary of his death, asks that the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time be dedicated to the **celebration, reflection and sharing of the Word of God**. In addition, on this *Sunday of the Word of God* we are invited to strengthen ties with the Jewish community and to pray for Christian unity.

In the text we are considering today, Jesus outlines the itinerary of his mission; it is like a preamble, an *overture* to **the programme** of what he will accomplish in the course of his public ministry. It also presents **the goal** of his mission, of his presence

in our history, where salvation breaks through. The author of this Gospel follows traditions and the historiographical method to describe the roots of the Messiah.

Jesus, during the celebration of the Sabbath inside the synagogue, using an oracle of the Prophet Isaiah (*Is* 61:1-2) and enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit, indicates what is at the heart of his proclamation. *He came to bring glad tidings to the poor,*



to proclaim liberty to captives, to give sight to the blind, to liberate those who are oppressed. This is the proclamation of salvation and the denunciation of injustice, the specific mission of the *New Kingdom*.

Jesus also claims to have come to proclaim *a year of the Lord's grace (or favour)*, inspired by Psalm 9:1-2 which alludes to a jubilee year where various favours were granted. It was a sabbatical year of rest, which could be

given every 10, 20, 25 or 50 years. But when we hear these words of Jesus, we think that he wants to communicate to us something deeper, which we could interpret as the **fulfilment of the time of salvation**, that is, that Jesus, the Messiah, the Lord, *has brought us a year of grace that will continue throughout the history of redemption*: for those who have lived from the beginning of humanity; for those of us who live in these already





difficult times; and for those who will come and live until the consummation of time, because it is his light, the salvation that shines forever through his passion, death and resurrection, until he comes the second time.

That is why Jesus, once he hands over the scroll and goes to take his place, says, *“This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.”*

Taking as reference the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy and the text of Luke behind this year’s liturgical-pastoral resource booklet, *“blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it”*, it is important to go beyond just listening. At the end of his Letter *Aperuit Illis*, the Pope invited God’s people to grow in religious and conscientious familiarity with Sacred Scripture on this Sunday, dedicated to the Word. He did so just as the sacred author taught in ancient times: *“(this Word)... is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance”* (Dt 30:14). On the path of listening to and putting into practice the Word of God, we are accompanied by the Mother of the Saviour, recognised as blessed, because she believed in the fulfilment of what the Lord told her and because she did what the Lord commanded her.

In light of the passage you have just

meditated upon, you can answer the following questions: *do you move from proclamation or reflection to action?* In other words, ask yourself, *do I help in my family? Do I help with the daily chores? Do I serve in my community, in my country, or do I just criticise? Do I volunteer in my parish? Am I available for any work that helps build the Kingdom of God? Do I put my talents at the service of others? Do I offer a good testimony of what I preach?*

PRAYING (ORATIO) (WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO THE LORD?)

Now, in prayer, we enter into an intimate and personal dialogue with God to savour the active and creative presence of his Word. Thus, with the Word of God in my hands, I turn to him. It can be a spontaneous prayer or one that we already know, the important thing is that it expresses what we want to say to God, our Father. An example might be the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, Master of Love, I come before you to ask your forgiveness for the many times that I have been unfaithful to you in words, deeds and omissions; for the times that I speak of Love and do not love adequately for others to believe in

you. Forgive me for not teaching your Word of Life by my example. I want to thank you, Lord Jesus, for this Word of Life, bread, that satisfies my hunger for you. Thank you for reminding me that I must be a living witness of your love, so that your face may be reflected in mine. I ask you for grace, for the gift of wisdom and the fear of God. I ask you to take always my faith and my life by the hand, in order to be consistent in what I say and bear witness to your immense love.

Lord Jesus, you have told us that you have come to *bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord*; we ask you to help us also put your plan to spread the Kingdom into practice. You know that I am small, but with the help of my brothers and sisters, I will be able to embark on this beautiful adventure to walk towards holiness.

Thank you heavenly Father for your Son Jesus Christ, our brother. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, that infusing his gifts has wrapped us in your love. Thank you Holy Trinity for creating communion among all creatures. Amen.

CONTEMPLATING - DISCERNING - ACTING (ACTIO) (WHAT AM I SAYING YES TO?)

Finally, we prepare to cross the threshold of the door of faith to make the Word of the Lord alive and to continue the process of evangelisation in your diocese, parish, community, forming a Church according to the heart of God, calling others to be also witnesses of divine love.

Here are some *suggestions* that might demonstrate a small but significant personal change based on the *prayerful reading* you have done of the biblical text:

- I will take action, and do something I know I should be doing in my life.
- I will develop a '**project of service, prayer, and good works**', like the one Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth, and share it with others to encourage them to make the Gospel message credible by our example. In this 'service project', I will think of something concrete I can do so as to alleviate the pain and suffering that the pandemic has caused in others.

Pastoral Proposal: Commentary on the Daily Gospel on the Internet

Not everything the pandemic brought was negative...something very positive has been the interest in the meaning of the biblical texts proclaimed in the daily Eucharistic Celebration, which thanks to 'social media' has been within everyone's reach even during the most critical moments of the pandemic.

Here are some pastoral initiatives to make the richness of Sacred Scripture available to the faithful every day.

THE DAILY WORD DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX

Get the Daily Readings Every Morning is a service of the USCCB. Subscribe by visiting:

www.bible.usccb.org/#subscribe

Want to stay connected to Christ and his Gospel every day? Receive daily *Gospel Reflections* from the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn (Australia). Subscribe here: www.catholicvoice.org.au/living-word/ and follow their three easy steps.

Connect@home: daily readings, resources, etc. from the Diocese of Bathurst (Australia). "Each morning, you will receive an email with a link to the daily readings set by the Church and a short reflection and prayer. You could do this sacred reading on

your own, or with members of your household." Subscribe here:

www.bathurst.catholic.org.au/?i=2037&connect-home-daily-readings-resources-and-mass-online



LECTIO DIVINA GUIDES

You can find *Lectio Divina* guides, in English, Italian and Spanish, offered by the Carmelites on their web page:

www.ocarm.org/en/prayer/lectiodivina

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops offers *Lectio Divina* guides on this web page:

www.catholic.bible/

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE DAILY GOSPEL

To read a reflection on the daily Gospel based on Ignatian Spirituality visit:

www.magisspirituality.org/ignatian_reflections/





GENERAL BIBLICAL RESOURCES

The Catholic Biblical Federation: “The Catholic Biblical Federation was founded in April 1969 with the encouragement of Pope Paul VI for the implementation of the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution *Dei Verbum* and in particular of its chapter on the Holy Scripture in the Life of the Church. The CBF members’ rich experience in Bible sharing and in the development of translations and materials within the various world cultures over the years provides a real treasure that can benefit the Biblical pastoral ministry of all Catholic organisations and associations devoted to the important ecclesial mission”. Visit: www.c-b-f.org/

The God who Speaks initiative is a great way to engage with the Scriptures. Pope Gregory the Great in the 5th century once said that ‘Scripture is like a river, shallow enough for lambs to paddle in and deep enough for elephants to swim in.’ And this is the ethos behind the God who Speaks vision which seeks to respond to a variety of levels and learning styles. Through this initiative new and renewed encounters with Christ are created through the Scriptures. And a transformation in the faith and life of our Church, and in the public arena

through evangelisation, education, creative arts and social action.

The God who Speaks initiative has three themes:

- Celebrating God’s Word – enriching our worshipping and spiritual community.
- Living God’s Word – enriching our social action and outreach.
- Sharing God’s Word – enriching our formation, proclamation and evangelisation.

Explore here: www.godwhospeaks.uk/ for a wealth of resources including:

- *Bible Basics:* www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/bible-basics/
- *Echoes of God:* a seven week Bible course for beginners led by David McLoughlin. www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/bible-basics/group-resources/echoes-of-god-journeying-with-the-word-of-god/
- *Between the Testaments* by Fr Michael Hall on those texts that didn’t make it into the Canon but have much to enrich our biblical understanding. www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/bible-basics/scripture-seekers/between-the-testaments/
- *The Word at Home:* www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/word-at-home/

- *Education*: a whole section dedicated to primary and secondary school resources. www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/education/
- *Art and culture*: www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/art-and-culture/

If you'd like a basic overview of the Catholic Faith and how it relates to the Bible then why not try our *Word on the Go: the Bible for Busy Catholics*:

www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/word-on-the-go/



THE
GOD
WHO
SPEAKS

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS PRAYER:

Pilgrim God,
you walk alongside us
and speak to us throughout
the Scriptures:
in the message of the prophets,
the songs of David
and the vision of Paul.
Your Son, Jesus Christ,
listens to our hopes and fears
and shows us how to live:
in our love of neighbour
our desire for justice,
and in our dying and rising each day.
Send us the Holy Spirit to open
our hearts and minds
so that we may be your witnesses
throughout the world:
in our protection of the vulnerable,
our words and actions
and in our communion with the earth.
Amen



The Word of God in Personal Prayer

The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord: the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him... In this way, our word to God becomes God's word, thus confirming the dialogical nature of all Christian revelation, and our whole existence becomes a dialogue with the God who speaks and listens, who calls us and gives direction to our lives. Here the word of God reveals that our entire life is under the divine call.

(Verbum Domini 24)

The Method of Popular and Communal Bible Reading

AN EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

A *popular and communal reading of the Bible* grounded in the community's faith is the experience of the mystery of God the Father revealed and incarnated in history in Jesus Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. Such experience stems from a reading of the Bible understood as the living and life-giving Word of God, that liberates and transforms structures, generates and promotes life. This way

of reading began in the *basic ecclesial communities* of Latin America. Sacred Scripture is the book through which God reveals his closeness to the people, revealing his holiness and that of his people.

This method of reading the Bible is not, in the first place, an individualistic or academic interpretation (always necessary, useful and irreplaceable, but not sufficient) of the Bible. Rather it is a reading carried out *in, for* and *by* the community, where all participants



contribute from their own lives, their current situation and their vital context or reality, their vision shaped by faith of all reality in view of the active and committed dynamism of communion and unity, as well as of life, justice and peace. “The Bible is the book of the Lord’s people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The word of God unites believers and makes them one people” (*Aperuit Illis* 4).



The Bible is intimately connected to the concrete circumstances of the individual reader, so that a reading of the Word of God deeply linked to the concrete, daily life of the community produces a surprising mutual enlightenment between *the Bible* and *life*. The meaning and scope of the Word and of the many words that make up Scripture appear and are enriched in the light of the many different situations that are lived and experienced in life and vice versa. In the background is the living consideration that assures us that, since God has acted in a prodigious way in the past to liberate and give life to his people in the various stages of their history, he will do the same today in the concrete history of his community, the Church.

LIFE AND THE WORD OF GOD

Everything here stems from ‘daily life’ and from the communal listening to the Word of God. It is amazing how people have this ability to discover or read the presence of God in daily life. For this reason, it is unquestionably based on the human experience of each participant and their environment, so that from the revealed Word and the living faith in God that it arouses, this personal and communal reality can be



enlightened and thus generate a faith response that dynamically engages everyone in the transformation of their religious, social, political, cultural and economic context. In this sense, the method of *Lectio Divina* with its various steps is of great help, without ever neglecting the effective commitment to transformation suggested by the Word and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

This reading begins with the sharing of the life of each participant, their situation, their conflicts, their questions, their worries, their struggles, their joys and convictions, their successes and their expectations of life and freedom. Hence, the importance that the community listens together to each participant, to their deep desires for a full life and their need for liberation. For this reason, the goal is not to obtain answers to questions posed by others, but to those that concern the community at that moment. Then the Word will reveal, illuminate, strengthen, uplift, set in motion, give tools for action, build the community, and praise and glorify the living and true God.

It is remarkable how freely and simply the members of the community lay bare their lives with their joys and hopes, their sorrows and anxieties in the simplest and most direct way, without

the need to use incomprehensible or complicated discursive language. They opt rather for the narration of facts, using comparisons, popular phrases, sayings, narratives known to all, revealing longings and hopes that require fulfilment and that undoubtedly have been illuminated by God through his Word, because he has won them over throughout the history of salvation.

Since God is the lover of life, is the 'Living One' and actualises his life-giving and liberating presence in today's history in each person and in the community, this reading of the Bible defends abundant life in all its manifestations. It also defends the inalienable and non-negotiable dignity of every human being as a son or daughter of God, without distinction or exclusion. The life and justice that flow from God's Word are two fundamental pillars for action and for the transformation of the environment into a place of dignified and abundant life for all.

UNDER THE DYNAMISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This reading of the Bible is wonderful because none of the readers think they

know more than the other and none think they are ignorant, for all have much to contribute from their reality and experience of what God reveals to them through his Word, contained in the Holy Scriptures. The reading and interpretation of the Bible in the community is determined by the dynamism of what the Spirit is saying to the community. This is why those who practise this method and those who live in the community always find it attractive and surprising. They are surprised to see how believers unite, commit themselves to the faith; come to love each other, transforming their environment.

The approach to the Bible is not based on the idea that it is a compendium of impartial theological treatises or a series of beautiful exemplary stories, much less understood as pious literature, *but as the written Word with which God offers the community guidance and light in various existential situations and moments of difficulty*. For this reason, in the *popular and communal reading of the Bible*, recourse to the biblical sciences is not renounced, but the approach to these resources is not made for the sole purpose of acquiring biblical knowledge or in order to accumulate data about the past.

Rather it is done, in order to obtain, under the light and the dynamism of the Holy Spirit, contributions for the orientation and discernment by faith of the current and complex situations that the community is living.

GOD'S PRESENCE IS CELEBRATED WITH GREAT JOY

It is also striking that the *popular and communal reading of the Bible* cannot remain only a reading, interpretation and updating of the text, but, being the mediation of an encounter with Jesus Christ, it demands the celebration of the revealed mystery of God for his people. It is then that the praise, thanksgiving, adoration, celebration, sharing of food and goods, solidarity with those most in need, and the greater justice of which Matthew speaks, flow forth in all their freshness and colour. God is on the side of his people and we are to celebrate him in a big and colourful way.

The following analysis of the passage from Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21 corresponding to the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C, will allow us to appreciate the richness of this method.

Popular and Communal Reading of the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Pope Francis in *Aperuit Illis* states, “Christ Jesus is knocking at our door in the words of Sacred Scripture. If we hear his voice and open the doors of our minds and hearts, then, he will enter our lives and remain ever with us” (n. 8). So let us be ready to listen to the Master with a well-disposed heart and mind, but above all with our lives, ready to welcome him, to discern what he wants and ready to build the community of faith.

SETTING

In the centre of the room where the meeting will take place, have two Bibles, one open to the book of Isaiah and the other to the book of Luke, from each of which the respective Bible readings can be read. This will help us become aware of the Word spoken in ancient times as a ‘promise’ and the Word proclaimed in the time of the ‘fulness’ of revelation.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, the faith experience of the men and women who walked with you through the lands of Galilee and Judaea shaped the work that Luke, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presents to us so that we might know the God

of our ‘Salvation’. Teach us to welcome your Word with its history and from the history of these men and women present here, so that, it may enlighten and encourage our actions in favour



of the transformation of our world. In this way your salvation can reach everyone without exception, but especially those whom you have shown to be the privileged recipients of the Good

News, of the year of the Lord's favour: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the oppressed, and the countless new despised and marginalised by society, by culture and by the economy. Amen.





READING THE TEXT: LUKE 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received.

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread through out the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and every one praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free,

to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'.

EXAMINING OR LOOKING AT THE REALITY OF "TODAY" IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The following activity can be done individually, although it should necessarily be done in a group (*it is a community Bible reading*). If it is done in smaller groups, the best practice is to share, after a period of reflection, the answers of each group and discuss them. Let us open our eyes to our reality, examine our daily lives, and ask ourselves:

- What religious, social, cultural, political and economic situations are we eyewitnesses to, *today*? (The following texts from Luke can help if needed: *Lk* 1:5-7; 2:1-3; 3:1-2, 7-14, 19-20).
- Who acts with the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit and who acts against the Holy Spirit?
- Who are the servants of the Word? Who are those seeking to stifle it and paralyse its dynamism?

- What is the soundness of the teaching we have received? How has it contributed or not contributed to an abundant life in our community?
- What is being taught “today” in the name of God through the various media outlets available in society?
- What liberating actions does the Spirit’s presence produce in the members of the community? (The following texts from Luke may be helpful: *Ac* 4:19-20; 5:29, 41-42).
- How is the Spirit’s vitalising or dynamic power announced and manifested to those oppressed by various social, economic, political, and cultural ills? (cf. *Lk* 7:21-23).
- How does the Word of God, both in the Old Testament and in Jesus’s preaching, proclaim the *Lord’s year of grace* for all and especially for those whom Luke wanted to highlight?
- What effect does Jesus’s proclamation have on today’s listeners?

A CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF LUKE’S TEXT

Let us look at Jesus’s actions in Galilee, in Nazareth, in the synagogue:

- Identify and mark in the text all the verbs that describe Jesus’s actions.
- Also, identify and mark the words

that indicate the people’s reaction to Jesus, to his reading, and to his proclamation of the Word.

The context of the Holy Spirit’s action in Luke

The incarnation of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit (*Lk* 1:35), the same Spirit enabled Simeon to recognise in the child Jesus the ‘Saviour’ (*Lk* 2:30), and thanks to the Spirit, Anna sees the awaited ‘Deliverer’ (*Lk* 1:38). John the Baptist announces that one with greater authority than himself will baptise them with the Holy Spirit and fire (*Lk* 3:16), when Jesus was baptised in the Jordan the Holy Spirit descended upon him (*Lk* 3:21-22), the same Spirit led Jesus into the desert for forty days where he was tempted by the devil (*Lk* 4:1-13). In the power of the Spirit Jesus returned to Galilee where he taught in the synagogues (*Lk* 4:14-15).

The texts that Luke presents have a common thread and element, which is the Holy Spirit, who empowers Jesus for the mission, strengthens him in temptation and gives him power and guidance. The birth narratives highlight the presence of the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus: not only does the Spirit rest upon him from the moment of his birth, but the Spirit



also begets Jesus. The Spirit descends in the form of a dove upon Jesus. The voice of God proclaims Jesus as the Messiah expected since Isaiah and in whom the Spirit dwells in an eminent way. Luke connects to the prophecies of Isaiah, that “today”, have been fulfilled, in Jesus.

***Today this Scripture is fulfilled:
Luke 4:18-19 (cf. Is 61:1-2; 58:6)***

“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has

sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the down-trodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”

Jesus’s reading of the text in the synagogue echoed extraordinary news, the Good News of God, and not only that, it provoked astonishment, tension and dramatic struggle. This scene in the Gospel represents the synthesis and model of Jesus’s preaching as the Messiah, it provokes great enthusiasm,



even if it is fleeting, since struggle and rejection will immediately follow, as we will read next Sunday, the Fourth of Ordinary Time.

However, the scene is marvellous from the point of view of the power of the Word of God proclaimed by Jesus with the authority of the Holy Spirit. Verses 20 and 21 are striking for their simplicity, for their revelatory power. Once the book is closed and put back in its place, the teaching is expected, so Jesus “sat down”.

Perhaps some of the listeners commented to themselves or to each other: if this man proclaims in this way, what are we to expect from his teaching, we must listen to what he has to say. Jesus sat down, however, not to begin a solemn teaching, nor to explain the content of the text, nor to bring out beautiful exhortations, nor wise advice, nor to demand heroic commitments. He sat down to indicate the fulfilment of the Word, that is, that it is fulfilled in the *today of history* and of the people who desire it and accept it with faith. All that was announced and proclaimed in Israel’s past is fulfilled “*today*”.

The Word proclaimed with authority touched not only the ‘ears’ of the participants in the synagogal worship on that unusual Sabbath in

Nazareth, but also the ‘eyes’ of all who are fixed on the preacher who, without a doubt, is the promised Messiah. The Messiah who, using a text from Isaiah, announces what will be his activity in Galilee and for which he is to be recognised also by his forerunner, John the Baptist, to whom he relates only the facts of what his envoys have “seen and heard”. The facts are before their eyes and ears: “*the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor receive the Good News*”. The envoys must tell John what they ‘see and hear *today*’, there is no presentation of theological discourse or reasons, only concrete facts, no documents, but liberating events, which reveal the year of grace of the Lord.

What opens our ears and allows us *to listen, to hear* the Word of God are the words of praise proclaimed to God:

- by those who were blind and *now see*;
- by the lame who *now walk* the streets announcing God’s powerful action in their bodies;
- by those who were mute and *now speak*, praise and glorify God;
- by the lepers who *show their clean flesh* and are reintegrated into the community and the holy assembly;



- by the dead who *proclaim with their lives* that death has been destroyed thanks to the Paschal Mystery;
- and, by the poor who *experience their closeness to salvation* thanks to the proclamation of the Good News of Salvation.

Yes, everything that happens “today” is a magnificent experience of expansive joy that is contagious, that proclaims, that warms the heart, and opens the eyes to the action of the Saviour. It is clear, then, why the passage in Isaiah 61:1-2 is especially appropriate to describe Jesus’s mission. He was anointed, not with oil, like the kings and priests of the Old Testament, but with the Holy Spirit.

The Word has that power which breaks into the life of those who are tired of hearing and no longer expect anything. The Word presents before their ‘eyes and ears’, ‘facts’ which give reason for the words written in times long past and which, when they are dusted off and proclaimed with the power of the Holy Spirit, open up the mystery of the incarnation in the *today* of the community. A community, which lets the facts, now accomplished, speak for themselves and in which they find reasons to assume their commitment with all its dynamism in the transformation of society.

The context within Luke’s Gospel

Luke’s section from 4:14 to 9:50 is devoted to Jesus’s ministry in Galilee, where he is fully engaged in his mission without leaving this territory. Jesus reveals himself in these chapters through his action and word: he evangelises, heals various diseases, exorcises, invites to conversion. It is a global or general presentation of Jesus: in the synagogues of Nazareth, Capernaum and throughout Galilee, he is presented as the *prophet-saviour*, the one who creates discipleship, the one who experiences rejection.

Luke recognises in this activity of Jesus in Galilee a revelatory moment, as we see from the titles he gives him: *Son of God*, *Son of Man*, *Christ* or *Master*, but also a programmatic proposal for the future time of the mission, which for Luke is already a present and active reality.

In the following scenes, we will see the fulfilment of all that Jesus announced. The gospel is proclaimed to the blessed poor (6:20; 7:22), sight is given to the blind (18:35-43), many are delivered from evil spirits (7:21). Everything serves to show how Scripture is fulfilled in and through Jesus, giving complete fulfilment to the salvific will of God who saves, heals, and liberates his people.

In the synagogue, there was not necessarily an official 'preacher of the Word of God', but every Israelite male of legal age had the right to read a text of Scripture and say a few words to explain it, and that is why Jesus was able to speak that Sabbath before the convened assembly. The reading of the Sacred Text was done while standing out of respect for the Word of God, while the teaching was done while seated.

The announcement of the *year of grace* alludes to the Jubilee years every fifty years and the Sabbatical years every seven years (cf. *Lv* 25:10-17). According to this legislation, the purpose of these years was the complete restoration of justice, the liberation of slaves, the forgiveness of debts and the restitution of property. However, if for some it was a year of grace (*Is* 61:1-2), for others it was a year of vengeance (*Is* 61:3). Vengeance in the Old Testament could be attributed to God or to human beings and consisted in defending the rights of the weak and repairing injustices. However, Jesus stops his reading at verse 2 of Isaiah, avoiding mentioning the day of vengeance in verse 3. Jesus focusses his message on the Good News for all; God did not send him to condemn or avenge.

An important detail for understanding the text is that, at that time, religion took the side of the poor, the destitute, and the helpless. Religious legislation encouraged a strong social spirit: fairness in wages, prohibition of usurious loans, jubilee years, almsgiving, permission to harvest, application of justice regardless of status, and it encouraged all to avoid impoverishment as much as possible, as well as everything consciously to help and protect the poor (cf. *Lv* 19:15).

In Luke 14:7-14 Jesus urges a host to invite to the banquet, the poor and those who cannot invite him in turn and promises the one who does so the eschatological reward. In the parable of the great banquet, Luke 14:16-23, the poor are also the first to be invited, replacing those who did not come. In Luke 16:20, 22, Lazarus, whose name means 'God helps', is the prototype of the poor welcomed by God, while in Luke 16:25, the nameless rich man who had no mercy is the image of the one who is condemned for his own unjust actions.

Luke's text allows us to contemplate the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy just as Jesus is revealed as the *expected messianic prophet*. In the context of Isaiah, the Prophet makes the prophetic announcement of the



Messiah in the face of the tension experienced by the people of Israel, especially in the face of division. Luke, for his part, with this text emphasises the sense of the anointing by the Spirit, with which the public activity of Jesus is inaugurated. Jesus heals, preaches, and lets himself be led by the Spirit. The Spirit empowers, inspires, and leads Jesus on mission as the Spirit did the Prophets of old.

The significance of Jesus's proclamation is aimed fully at the

prophetic mission of announcing and proclaiming the Good News of the Lord. What Isaiah announced is being fulfilled prophetically in Jesus; he presents himself as God's envoy, just like the prophet, but with the difference that he personifies God's Good News desired and expected by the people.

Luke will use, repeatedly, the image of the poor, both in the social sense of the word, as in those who have nothing materially, but also to



contrast with the rich, who for their greedy hearts are punished, while the poor, in that they possess only God, are liberated. Further, the stigma of the poor is present as a reflection of divine punishment for some sin committed and as those despised by the people. The poor were accepted or rejected depending on the approval made by the religious authorities and especially by the larger community.

Jesus approaches these groups of people (*Lk 4:18-19*) with a message of hope, he wants to gather them as God's special flock, his mission is that these people experience that they are loved by God and feel rich because "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". Among others, the gospel will show that they are the closest to attaining salvation.

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

The expression "to proclaim liberty to captives" refers to the context experienced by Isaiah's community that was being liberated from Babylonian captivity. A portion of the people were still in captivity, and it is to them the Prophet addresses his cry

of hope since they were still far from Jerusalem. Jesus gives a cry of hope to those who are waiting for their freedom. He comes to break the bonds that hold human beings prisoners and do not allow them to be free.

Jesus comes to overthrow by his life, by his death on the cross, and by his resurrection and ascension the oppression caused by sin. He comes to liberate those who are broken by sin and social injustice. He comes to heal afflicted hearts and to give them the dignity of being invited to the banquet of the Kingdom of God.

MAKING THE WORD RELEVANT BY ACCEPTING ITS CHALLENGES

Every personal and communal encounter with the Word of God has the saving effect of changing the people who hear it, because listening is intimately linked to action, commitment and solidarity with those who are privileged in the work of evangelisation. Hence the need to embark on feasible commitments in our environment.

- Jesus encourages us as a community to feed daily on the Word of God in order to become, like him, contemporaries ('people of today')



and bearers of the Good News of liberation for those we meet: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the oppressed and the new and countless despised and marginalised by society, culture, and the economy.

- Jesus exhorts us to open our eyes to come out of the individualism that leads to asphyxia and sterility, to walk with courage, dignity and Christian responsibility the path of sharing and solidarity with those whom he has a preferential option.
- Jesus shows us the vital urgency of going today to proclaim with authority and determination (*parrhesia*) the gospel to everyone, everywhere and on every occasion, without delay, without ill will and without fear, because the joy of the Gospel is for all people, it cannot exclude anyone.
- Jesus reveals to us, with a clear orientation, who must be especially favoured in the proclamation: the poor and the sick, those who are often despised and forgotten, those who have nothing to give in return.
- Jesus assures us that, today and always, the poor are the privileged recipients of the gospel, and that evangelisation directed gratuitously to them is a sign of the Kingdom that he has come to bring.

- Jesus leaves no doubt that there is an inseparable link between our faith and the care and liberation of the poor, and that there are no valid reasons to leave them alone, but urgent reasons to engage in their struggles and in the search to obtain justice for them.
- Jesus asks us for an ecclesial spirituality that heals, liberates, that fills with life and peace, that calls for communion in solidarity and missionary fruitfulness, and that humanises all without distinction or exclusion and gives glory to God.

PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

This time of reflection with the Word of God can be concluded with the following prayer recited by all participants:

Jesus, thank you for the freshness of the Word of God which, prophesied in the past in a precise historical moment in the life of your people, you bring to life in the present with all the dynamism and power of the Holy Spirit. Lead us to the strengthening of communion and unity with all, but especially with those whom religion, society, culture and the economy have left aside, the poor of all times and especially the new

and countless poor of today. Teach us to commit ourselves courageously to action and transformation, even when on the road we encounter obstacles, rejection, judgement, criticism and even martyrdom, witnessing with our lives your saving, liberating, consoling and life-giving power, and having as our goal the eternal life you have obtained for us through your Paschal Mystery. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

At the end of the meeting, the life, joy, consolation and peace that the Word has given us are shared among all and, if possible, we share the *bread of solidarity*, the table of communion a 'long table' where everyone finally has a place.

CONTINUE TO MEDITATE

At home, you can meditate further on the content of this Gospel by reading the following text by Pope Francis:

For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor "his first mercy". This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have "your minds...

must be the same as Christ Jesus" (*Ph* 2:5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor, which is understood as a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness". This option – as Benedict XVI has taught – "is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty". This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but also in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (*EG* 198).

Personal Testimony: The Word of God Can Change the Heart



TOKICHI ISHII

born 1871, unknown, Japan
died 1918, Tokyo, Japan

“I would like to tell how my heart has been changed by the power of Jesus Christ. But first I have to make a disclosure. When I was a child, my parents were poor and I attended

school for only two years. Since then, that is, for more than thirty years, I have rarely had a pen in my hand, until now, when I take it in my hand to write this story of my life.”

With these very simple and at the same time touching words, a man sentenced to death begins to write his testimony about how the Word of God has definitively transformed his life. How did this moment come about?

The first happy years of the little Tokichi Ishii soon turned into a much more complex and dramatic situation. As he himself notes, “We lived very comfortably until I was four or five years old, but at that time my father had lost everything due to alcohol addiction, and my mother was overwhelmed by household chores.”

Tokichi is forced to drop out of school at the age of ten, and his mother asks him to spend all his time pursuing his father in an attempt to get him to stop drinking. In vain. The father’s addiction is stronger than the little son’s pleas. A couple of months later, Tokichi’s mother falls seriously ill and his father moves her and his son to an aunt’s house and abandons them. They live in extreme poverty: they cannot even afford a doctor’s visit. At the age of eleven, the boy Tokichi manages to earn a few pennies, with which he buys medicine recommended by the neighbours for his mother, thus saving her life.

Shortly afterwards, his father returns and the whole family is

reunited, but then another problem emerges:

“Unfortunately, in the neighbourhood where we lived, everyone was gambling, even children of twelve or thirteen years of age. Up to that point I had not been known for anything mischievous, however, in that neighbourhood, it was easy to learn bad habits and soon, I started gambling like everyone else. Then I began to need money: the little my parents gave me was not enough, and I began to steal. This was the beginning of my criminal life.”

From petty crimes, Tokichi soon moves on to ones that are more serious. The glamour of crime draws him ever more strongly. At the age of nineteen, while stealing, the police catch him. He is convicted and ends up in prison. Having overcome his initial fear of prison, he becomes accustomed to the rules of prison life: “When I was sent to prison for the fourth time, I was already a confirmed criminal. In a prison community, one is famous for the extent of one’s crimes. The greater the crime, the greater the honour, and men openly brag about the wickedness they have committed.”

Tokichi tries to distance himself from the criminal world. He marries and for three years lives a modest



but happy life with his wife. One day a friend from his prison days comes to visit him and he resumes his criminal life, but now is more cruel and merciless than before. An eleven-year prison sentence changes him profoundly. Tokichi begins to hate the guards and rebels against them. In return for his behaviour, he is progressively punished. The vicious cycle of hatred takes over and makes Tokichi's heart impervious to good. On several occasions, he tries to break out of this cycle, but succeeds only briefly, before plunging back into an increasingly violent life of crime. He finally crosses another line: during robberies, he begins to kill people.

In 1915, Tokichi is finally captured and confesses to numerous crimes committed, including several murders. Before his trial, locked alone in a cell in Tokyo prison, he comes to terms not only with the judicial system, but also with his own conscience. Two missionaries visit the same prison: Mrs West and Mrs McDonald, who distribute food, talk to the condemned and leave them copies of the Bible. Thus, at the turn of 1915 and 1916, Tokichi receives the New Testament as a gift. Out of boredom, he opens the book a couple of times at random, reads how Jesus's disciples James and

John wanted to set fire to a Samaritan village (cf. *Lk* 9:52-58), also reads the parable about the lost sheep (cf. *Lk* 15:1-7), however, he is not touched by these texts.

Some time passes and Tokichi opens the Bible again. This time he reads about Jesus standing in front of Pilate and thinks:

"This person called Jesus was obviously a man who always tried to lead others on the path of virtue, and it seemed to me an inhumane thing to crucify him simply because he held different religious views than others. Even I, being the tough criminal that I am, thought it was really shameful that his enemies would treat him this way."

Thus, Tokichi continues reading.

"My attention was drawn to the sentence, '*And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*' I stopped: I had been struck in the heart, as if by a four-inch nail. What had the verse revealed to me? Can I call it, the love of Christ's heart? Can I call it, *his compassion*? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an indescribably grateful heart, I came to believe."

Despite being sentenced to death, Tokichi Ishii finds comfort in the Word of God. He begins his journey of faith and transformation, always

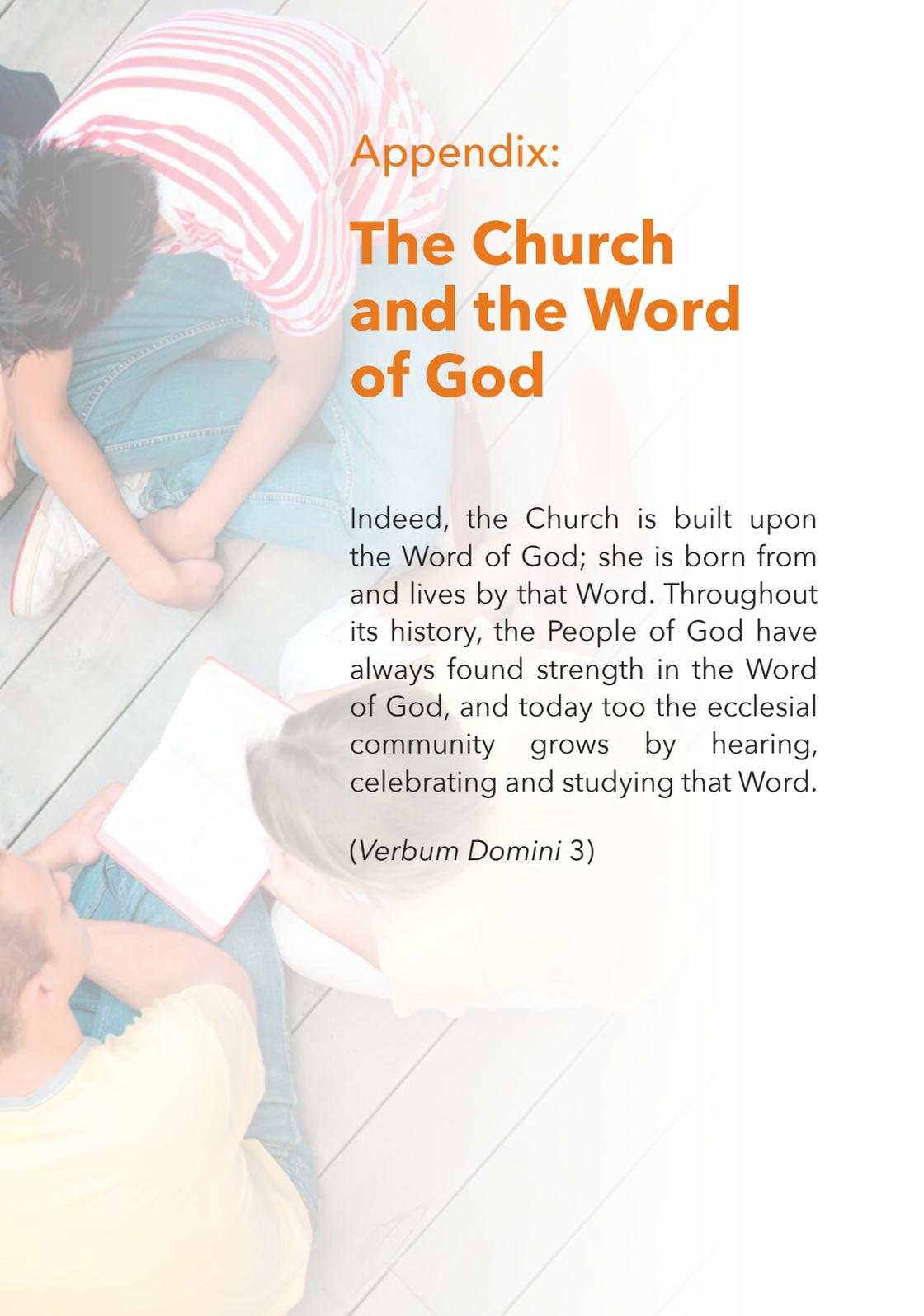
accompanied by the two missionaries. He writes his autobiography, which remains to this day his testimony of his encounter with the living God in his Word.

Tokichi Ishii, condemned to death for all his murders, is executed in

Tokyo on 17th August 1918, at 9:00 am. The chaplain notes that Tokichi's heart was calm and peaceful as he spoke his last words:

"My name is stained, my body dies in prison, my soul, purified, today, returns to the City of God."



A high-angle, top-down photograph of a group of people sitting on a light-colored wooden floor. In the foreground, a person with dark hair is seen from the back, wearing a red and white horizontally striped t-shirt and blue denim overalls. They are leaning forward, looking at an open book held by another person. To the right, a person with long brown hair is also seen from the back, wearing a white t-shirt and blue denim overalls, also looking at the book. In the bottom left corner, a person with short brown hair is seen from the side, wearing a yellow t-shirt, looking towards the book. The background shows more people sitting on the floor, some partially visible. The overall scene suggests a group study or a shared reading session in a casual setting.

Appendix:

The Church and the Word of God

Indeed, the Church is built upon the Word of God; she is born from and lives by that Word. Throughout its history, the People of God have always found strength in the Word of God, and today too the ecclesial community grows by hearing, celebrating and studying that Word.

(Verbum Domini 3)

The Voice of the Popes

In order to deepen the spiritual content of the biblical texts of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C, here are a few comments that the last Supreme Pontiffs have made in some of their speeches.

COMMENTARY BY POPE JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II, on 23rd January 1983, while on a pastoral visit to the Roman Parish of *Santa Maria Regina*



Pacis, during his homily made the following commentary on the biblical texts of that Sunday:

The first reading, taken from the book of Nehemiah, reminds us of the veneration with which the People of God in the Old Testament listened to the words of Holy Scripture, read by the priest Ezra on the day “consecrated to God”. “In full view of all the people... Ezra opened the book; and when he opened it all the people stood up.... Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people raised their hands and answered, ‘Amen! Amen!’” (*Ne* 8:5-6)... May hearing the Word of God make our hearts rejoice and guide our conduct [in this] Year of the Lord and throughout our lives. Amen!

COMMENTARY BY POPE BENEDICT XVI

Against the backdrop of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, Pope Benedict XVI, during the Angelus on 24th January 2010, made the following commentary on that Sunday’s Second Reading:

Among the biblical readings in today’s liturgy is the famous text

from the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, in which St Paul compares the Church to a human body.... The Church is perceived as a body, of which Christ is the head, and with him, she forms a whole. Yet what the Apostle is eager to communicate is the idea of unity among the multiplicity of charisms, which are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to these, the Church appears as a rich and vital organism, not uniform, fruit of the one Spirit who leads everyone to profound unity, because she welcomes differences without eliminating them and thus brings about a harmonious unity. She extends the presence of the Risen Lord throughout history, specifically through the Sacraments, the word of God and the charisms and ministries distributed among the community. Therefore, it is in Christ and in the Spirit that the Church is one and holy, that is, an intimate communion that transcends human capacities and sustains them.... May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, obtain for us to progress always in communion, in order to pass on the beauty of all being one in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.



COMMENTARY BY POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis, during his apostolic journey to Panama for the Thirty-Fourth World Youth Day, (Sunday 27th January 2019), in the Holy Mass celebrated at the St John Paul II Field – Metro Park in front of 700 thousand young people from 160 countries around the world, commenting on the biblical texts of that Sunday said:

“All eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, ‘This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen’.” (Lk 4:20-21). With these words, the Gospel presents the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry. It started in the synagogue that saw him grow up; he was in the midst of neighbours and people he knew, and perhaps even some of his childhood ‘catechists’ who had taught him the Law.... A word previously proclaimed only as a future promise, but now, on the lips of Jesus alone, could be spoken in the present tense, as it became a reality: *“This text is being fulfilled today”*. Jesus reveals the now of God, who comes to meet us and call us to take part in his now of *“bringing the good news to the poor... proclaiming liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free,*

to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.” (Lk 4:18-19). This is the now of God. It becomes present with Jesus: it has a face, it is flesh. It is a merciful love that does not wait for ideal or perfect situations to show itself, nor does it accept excuses for its appearance. It is God’s time, that makes every situation and place both right and proper. In Jesus, the promised future begins and becomes life. When? Now. Yet not everyone who was listening felt invited or called. Not all the residents of Nazareth were prepared to believe in someone they knew and had seen grow up, and who was now inviting them to realise a long-awaited dream. Not only that, but they said, *“This is Joseph’s son, surely?”* (Lk 4:22).

The same thing can also happen with us. We do not always believe that God can be that concrete and commonplace, that close and real, and much less that he can become so present and work through somebody like a neighbour, a friend, a relative.... We can also run the same risks as the neighbours at Nazareth, when within our communities the gospel seeks to be lived concretely. We begin to say: but these young people, are they not the children of Mary, Joseph, are they not the *brothers and sisters of...related to...?* Are these not the youngsters

we saw grow up? They should keep quiet; how can we believe them? That one over there, was not he the one who kept breaking windows with his ball? What was born as prophecy and proclamation of the kingdom of God gets domesticated and impoverished. Wanting to domesticate the word

of God is a daily temptation.... As in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Lord stands up again among us his friends and acquaintances; he takes the book and says to us, *“This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.”* (Lk 4:21).



Biblical Aspects of the Ministry of Lector

The publication of the Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, which modified canon 230 § 1 of the *Code of Canon Law* giving women the possibility of accessing the instituted ministries of Lector and Acolyte, as well as the Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the same subject, both published on 10th January 2021, offer the possibility to deepen some aspects of the *Ministry of the Lector* from a biblical perspective in order to encourage its institution in our communities.

A MINISTERIAL CHURCH

The Church is a network of relationships that draws strength, vitality, from the life of Christ that circulates abundantly thanks to the proclamation of the Word, “the supreme rule of faith” (DV 21); thanks to the breaking of the bread in the Eucharistic celebration by which “the unity of all believers...is both expressed and brought about” (LG 3); and thanks through the prayer of believers and their communion (cf. Ac 2:42). This divine life which, beginning with baptism, flows through the veins of believers urges them to live their entire existence as a liturgy that leads to *diakonia*, that is, to joyful service

to Christ and to their brothers and sisters (cf. Rm 12:1-8). This *diakonia* or *ministeriality*, which is constitutive of the Church’s life and which is manifested in a special way “in the full and active participation of all God’s holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist” (SC 41), is not exhausted in the ordained ministries (episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate), conferred through a sacramental rite of ordination. It is also enriched by *instituted* ministries such as that of Lector and Acolyte (the conferring of which is not called ‘ordination’ but ‘institution’) and of other ministries that are entrusted to the lay faithful without a liturgical rite.

The ministries of Lector and Acolyte are not born of the Sacrament of Orders, but are in fact *instituted* by the Church in consideration of “the aptitude the faithful have, by virtue of baptism, to take on special tasks and duties in the community” (*Evangelisation and Ministries*, 62, Italian Bishops’ Conference). They are a gift by which the Holy Spirit builds up the Church and pertain to a grace obtained through the intercession and blessing of the Church. The lectorate and acolyte thus represent one of the points of arrival of the reform inspired by Vatican II. At the same

time these ministries also represent a point of departure for further developments, on which to reflect today, after the questions raised by the Amazon Synod and after the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to nourish the faith of the baptised in circumstances of temporary restriction of personal freedoms, including the reception of the sacraments.

Since “faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ.” (*Rm* 10:17), it is necessary for the Church to send to her brothers and sisters, those who “bring good news” (*Rm* 10:15), lay faithful, men and women, dedicated to proclaiming the Word during the Eucharistic celebration and capable of transforming it into life through personal witness, evangelisation and catechesis. The lector, as an icon of the Church who proclaims the Gospel to the world, responds to the mandate received from the Risen Lord – “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation” (*Mk* 16:15). The lector makes the Word resound by giving voice to God in the assembly and, by proclaiming it with his or her being, he or she actualises it and offers an initial understanding of it.

The prophetic task of proclaiming

the Word in the assembly is the sacramental sign of the *martyria* (witness) of that same Word in the life of the world. However, this task is not limited to the context of the liturgical celebration, but extends to a service that interacts with all brothers and sisters.

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

If the Prophet is a witness to the efficacy of God’s word, as we see with Ezekiel invited to eat the scroll of the Word (*Ezk* 2:8; 3:1-3), with Isaiah called by God to bring his Word after experiencing the purification of his lips (*Is* 6:5-7), and with Jeremiah chosen to be “the mouth of God” (*Jr* 1:9, 15:19), it is the scribe Ezra who in the Old Testament becomes the *official depositary of the Word*, as icon of the *lector* who dispenses the Word, summarised in the expression “the book of the law of Moses” (*Ne* 8:1), which is proclaimed to the people.

After the drama of the exile and the difficult reconstruction of the walls at the time of their return to the land, the people retain the clear consciousness of still being partners in the covenant with God and guardians of a Word. The *Word* is the glue that binds its



members together, anchoring them to the memory of “all this great work that the LORD has done.” (*Dt* 11:7) in the past. It is the *attractive force that brings together “as one man”* (*Ne* 8:1) all men, women, and those...“old enough to understand” his message and who are motivated by the desire to turn their ears to the book of the law (*Ne* 8:3). We thus return to the origin: the people of the covenant arise from listening, which is the gateway to the commandments, as recalled by the famous passage of the *Shema Yisrāēl* of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the masterpiece of Jewish spirituality, set in the heart of Israel’s prayer and the foundation of its tradition. In all likelihood, the formula “Listen, Israel!” was the traditional call with which the *qāhāl*, the cultic assembly of the tribes, opened and which is repeated in the central texts of the exodal traditions. The strong appeal that resounds in the *Shema* refers to two stages: the internalisation of the Word (vv. 4-6) and its transmission (vv. 7-9).

It begins with a *journey in which, tending towards God, one goes towards oneself* in order to open one’s interiority to the Word of God, to then possess it, assimilate it, give it a welcoming so that the entire person may live a true ‘heart to heart’ with the God who

speaks. The second is a path towards one’s neighbour, which involves the transmission of the Word through a special spiritual fruitfulness. Through this process of memorisation (which begins with listening and consists in remembering and understanding) and of sharing the tradition (which happens through teaching), the immaterial Word takes on roots and manifests itself in the family’s upbringing, in one’s network of relationships, and even in one’s clothing and housing. The believer places the seal of the Word on every aspect of life, which only if it is concretely accepted, can it also flow outwards, into the world.

In order to celebrate the event of the return to Jerusalem and Judah and to sanction the rebirth of their identity, the people start again from the Word, the wedding gift of the LORD to Israel, his bride; they put it at the centre and organise outside the sacred area of the Temple a solemn liturgy described in detail in the book of Nehemiah (8:1-12). This liturgy appears as *the model for the synagogal reading and for every liturgy of the Word*. Even without entering the Temple and practising the sacrifices, communion with God is possible through listening to the Word, especially the book of Deuteronomy, the second covenant-

law that reformulates the Sinaitic covenant-law (*Ex* 20–31) given in view of the entry into the Promised Land.

One can identify the matrix of our current liturgy of the Word, in the people that gather in the square (the verb in the Greek version is *synago*, from which the term ‘synagogue’ derives), in the communion that harmonises diversity in the unity of listening together, and in the Sacred Text presented to all with great solemnity. It can be identified further in the reading made from the ambo, and in the veneration by an entire people moved by the content of a word that sets its existence in motion. Together with the uniting force of the Word that gathers the people as if they were ‘one man’ (*Ne* 8:1), we see the perseverance and dedication of the lector and the listeners who devote ample time to the Word, from the morning until noon (*Ne* 8:3), and the vitality of the reading/proclamation/translation and explanation/understanding (*Ne* 8:3, 12) that moves to conversion and joy. Listening to the Word essentially has three effects: it reunites the people who had experienced dispersion; it wipes away the tears that flowed from the ordeal of deportation by communicating joy; and it restores to Israel a constitutive dimension of its

identity, that of celebration, through the return to ancient traditions, in particular to the Festival of Sukkot which commemorated the stay of the forefathers in the *sukkas* (huts) after the exodus from Egypt.

This practice of *proclaiming and commenting* on the Scripture became increasingly popular through the synagogue service, which consisted of reading the Torah and the Prophets. The details of the synagogue liturgy are reported in the New Testament in *Luke* 4:16-22, where Jesus, a frequent visitor to the synagogue, is described in the dual function of lector and commentator of the Sacred Text. The evangelist describes the synagogue worship on the Sabbath, centred on the proclamation of Scripture, the true heart of the worship, in a fairly precise and detailed manner. After the recitation of some prayers, such as the *Shema*, the commandments, the *tefillah* or the prayer of the eighteen blessings, there followed the reading of a passage from the Torah and one of the Prophets by a layman (as we see also in *Ac* 13:27; 15:21; 2 *Co* 3:15), the homily and a prayer that ended with a great doxology (the *kaddish*). Jesus is then entrusted with the scroll of Isaiah and he performs the ritual actions: he gets up to read the passage and



sits down to comment on it. Next to Jesus, there is an attendant (*yperétes*) to whom he hands the scroll of Isaiah after the reading. According to the text, there were no official lectors but all could be invited by the head of the synagogue to read and comment on the word, including occasional visitors, as happens in Acts of the Apostles 13:15, where Paul and his companions who had come to the synagogue in Antioch on the Sabbath day are invited to pass on a few words of exhortation.

In the book of Revelation 1:3 we find the beatitude of the lector (*ho anaghinóskon*) which is placed side by side with that of the listeners. What the Johannine community reads “it was the Lord’s day” (*Rv* 1:10), in the liturgical context, where the resurrection of the Lord is experienced, are no longer the Scriptures of Israel, but the Christian ones, called “words of prophecy”, considered inspired, which every believer must keep (cf. *Rv* 1:3; 22:7). To the Old Testament Scriptures are added the Scriptures of the New Covenant, such as the Letters of the Apostles, which are read, explained and actualised by *didáskaloi*, that is, *teachers* (*catechists*). Then, as confirmed by various testimonies of the second century of the Christian era, the figure of the lector (in Greek

anagnóstes, in Latin *lector*) appears, in charge of reading the Scriptures during liturgical celebrations, a very important role since the reading of the Sacred Texts represents one of the liturgical elements of clear apostolic origin. Justin speaks of it in his *First Apology* (composed around 150), distinguishing the lector from the presider, whose task it is to give the exhortation. With Tertullian, in 200, a proper, stable ministry is delineated, distinct from that of the bishop, the priest and the deacon. Further, Hippolytus of Rome clarifies in his *Traditio Apostolica* that “the lector is instituted in the act in which the bishop hands him the book: the imposition of hands, is not, in fact, performed”. Lectors were offered a thorough biblical training, so much so that during liturgical celebrations, they could read all the sacred books, including the Gospels, of which they were also physical guardians. In the fourth century, the reading of the Gospels was entrusted to the deacon, and starting in the seventh century, the lectorate gradually declined to become one of the minor orders.

The revision of the minor orders occurred only thanks to the urging of the Second Vatican Council. With Pope Paul VI’s *Motu Proprio Ministeria*

Quaedam of 15th August 1972, the instituted ministries which, until then, in the Latin Church had been steps on the path towards ordained ministries, “assumed an autonomy and stability, as well as a possibility of their being given to the lay faithful” (CL 23). The 2008 Synod on the Word of God reaffirmed that “while the Gospel is proclaimed by the priest or deacon, the first and second readings in the Latin tradition are proclaimed by the appointed lector, male or female” (VD 58). The instruction of 20th July 2020 by the Congregation of the Clergy goes a step further when it states, “The lay faithful in accordance with the norms of law can be instituted lectors and acolytes in a stable form, by means of an appropriate rite” (*Pastoral Conversion* 97). In addition, the recent Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini* confirms this: “Lay persons (male and female) who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of Lector and Acolyte.”

In order to live, the Church needs to ‘feed on the bread of life’ from the table not only of the Body of Christ but also of the Word of God (DV 21). Listening to the Word of God is an

essential condition for the life of every baptised person and of the entire Church. It is from the Word that the Church with her sacraments is born, and it is the word of the Gospel that the Church brings when she goes out on mission and reaches “the inmost soul of our cities” (EG 74). This Word, contained in Scripture, is concentrated entirely in Christ who, according to patristic and medieval tradition, is the ‘Abbreviated Word’. In him, the *verba multa* (the many words) of the biblical writers become forever *Verbum unum* (the one Word) which gives access to a path of Christian spirituality leading to intimacy with the Father and to communion with our brothers and sisters.

In order that God’s people may hear the word of God (cf. *Lk* 11:28), the Holy Spirit has given rise to the ministry of the Lector. It is rooted in the Father’s plan of love for the salvation of humankind, which was revealed and fulfilled in his Son Jesus who, risen from the dead, ascended to the Father and entrusted to the Church, in the person of the Apostles, the mandate to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (cf. *Mk* 16:15).

According to the indications given by Pope Francis in his letter addressed to the Prefect of the Congregation for



the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the promulgation of the *Motu Proprio Spiritus Domini*, we are waiting for the modifications to the Rite of Institution of Lectors and Acolytes. The current rite provides for the *Ministry of Lector* to be conferred during the celebration of the Eucharist. Immediately after the proclamation of the Gospel, the candidates are called by name, followed by the homily or exhortation of the celebrant, the invitation to prayer addressed to the assembly, the solemn prayer of blessing, and the explanatory rite, which for *lectors* consists in the handing over of the book of Sacred Scripture.

FORMATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THIS MINISTRY

In conformity with what Pope Francis has decided, “It will be the responsibility of the *Episcopal Conferences* to establish appropriate criteria for the *discernment* and *preparation* of men and women candidates for the *ministries of Lector*” (*Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 10th January 2021). These criteria are to be based on the personal and local situations, and are to avoid any improvisation, because the *lector* is

the first mediator of the Word of God, the one who must help the liturgical assembly welcome its message and to preserve it in order to translate it into life. His or her entire person is called to transmit a Word that is “the power of God saving all who have faith” (*Rm* 1:16). The body, the face, the voice, and even clothing, become vehicles for the message of Scripture. Moreover, the *lector* is asked not only to proclaim texts, but also to understand the message contained therein (cf. *Ac* 8:30) in order to receive it in faith. To this end, it will be important to have an *ongoing process of frequenting the biblical text* that includes the three stages of *proclaiming, understanding and believing*.

This *preparation* should include *linguistic, historical and cultural formation* that allows one to read the text fluently, to grasp its internal structure and to focus on the context of the events narrated and the cultural categories with which the different biblical texts were written. A *biblical and theological formation* that helps one grasp the differences between literary genres, the intention of the biblical authors, the effects they intended to produce and the heart of the message revealed in the light of faith. A *liturgical formation* that helps

to grasp the profound meaning of the liturgy, the structure of the liturgy of the Word, and the relationship between the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy. A *technical formation* that allows one to read the biblical text without any difficulty, with correct diction, with the right intonation according to its literary genre, both out loud and with the use of amplification instruments that

make the content of the readings more understandable. This technical formation should also include knowing the posture that allows one to project one's voice in the best possible way and wearing appropriate clothing that combines sobriety and decorum.



The Word of God in the Life of the Family

LOVING THE WORD OF GOD

The family, “*the domestic church*” (LG 11), is a propitious place to listen to, meditate on, and pray with *the Word of God* (cf. VD 85). However, in order for it completely to nourish family and ecclesial life, three decisions must be renewed each day:

1. to love the Word of God, because the freshness of love eliminates the toxins of narcissism;
2. to love the Word of God, because the abundance of love produces vitality (*strength*) to face the difficulties of life;
3. to love the Word of God, because the fragrance of love makes us perceive that the only person who needs to change is *ourselves*.

By loving the Word of God, we give it the possibility to descend quickly into the depths of our fears (often unexpressed) and enlighten the joys we experience with full meaning. Loving the Word of God is the most effective manner to avoid being superficial people: individuals incapable of descending into the depths of the great existential questions present in our hearts, resigned to drifting away on the surface of daily gossip. Love, on the other hand, searches,

ploughs; love does not run away from disappointments and failures; on the contrary, it penetrates them in order to process them and discover them as an opportunity for rebirth and relaunching:

“You feel cornered. You dream of escape. But beware of mirages. To escape from yourself, do not run, do not run away from yourself: plough into this narrow space you have been given... Vanity runs, love burrows. If you flee out of yourself, your prison will run with you and in the wind of the race it will shrink more and more around you: if, on the other hand, you immerse yourself in yourself, it will open wide and become paradise!” (Gustave Thibon)

It is fitting to ask ourselves:

- *Do I love the Word of God? How can I show my love for it?*
- *Do I feel that the Word of God makes me grow in love with my family and the Church?*

THE WORD OF GOD PROMOTES GENEROSITY

“You care for the earth, give it water,... you drench its furrows, you level it, soften it with showers, you bless

its growth.” (Ps 64). God himself is the model to which humanity must refer to in order to inhabit the earth according to justice. Throughout the year, God works diligently as a wise farmer because God wants to feed his family, humanity.

The first chapters of the book of Genesis are realistic: we often experience the earth seemingly forgotten by its Gardener, watered with terrifying regularity by the blood of the innocent Abel. The same pages, however, also remind us of God’s dream: humanity is called to inhabit the earth and to collaborate with its Creator by guarding it with passion and cultivating it responsibly. In God’s dream, the earth is the garden of encounter, dialogue and sharing.

Let us help each other live our familial and ecclesial relationships by ploughing deep into the earth of our ideas with the ploughshare of the good Word of God, in order to learn to welcome and discover as brothers and sisters those who can no longer cultivate their land because they are forced to flee wars and violence. Pope Francis reminds us that the land entrusted to us by God is inhabited in large part by hungry and desperate people, in need of being welcomed around the table of solidarity:

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.... If these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: what is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” (L SI’ 160)

- *Has meditating on God’s Word led you to care for creation and share your possessions with those in need?*

THE WORD OF GOD PROPOSES A WAY OF LIFE

“*the land I will show you*” (Gn 12:1): with this indication, God opens wide the window of Abraham’s life towards unforeseen horizons, different from those he had drawn on his ‘agenda’. God’s promise of another land allows Abraham to experience life as an ever-new path, orientated forwards, towards a goal that will give him the courage to endure the joys and hardships of the daily human adventure. The ‘*Promised Land*’ is the lifestyle of those who allow



themselves to be influenced, touched, by Jesus of Nazareth, the meek and humble God. It is the lifestyle with which we are called to relate to our spouse, children, schoolmates, teachers, co-workers, neighbours, parents, the poor and the needy, the rich and the healthy. A 'Promised Land' is not a 'conquered land'. A 'Promised Land' evokes the precariousness of walking. A 'conquered land' evokes the safeguarding of a trophy. A 'Promised Land' engenders desire and openness to the future. A 'conquered land'

fosters rigidity and fear of the future.

Are we conquerors or wayfarers? Conquerors consider the 'Promised Land' a reality to be seized, or a role to be obtained at all costs and occupied for as long as possible. Conquerors exploit the 'Promised Land' for their own benefit, forgetting the One who had entrusted it to them and why he had promised it to them. Conquerors willingly doze off in the comfortable armchair of having understood everything and, almost always, of having understood it better than others have.



Wayfarers, on the other hand, discover in the people who are close to them and in the environment that surrounds them, the 'Promised Land' towards which they are called to take the first step in order to create fraternity and preserve the 'common home' of humanity.

- *Wayfarers in this land or conquerors of this land?*



THE WORD OF GOD BEGETS THE COMMON GOOD

Pharaoh told Joseph, "I hereby make you governor of the whole land of Egypt" (*Gn* 41:41). Joseph's story (cf. *Gn* 37–50) has the value of giving the first pages of Genesis the just equilibrium about the correct relationship between humanity and the land. There is a need for men like Joseph, "the Egyptian", people who know how to guard and cultivate the land in the time of plenty (*fat cows*) and, above all, in the time of scarcity (*lean cows*). Joseph interprets the work as a true political leader: valuing the crops, storing them in the barns but then knowing how to open these storage places in time of need. To Egypt flocked people "from every country" trying to escape from hunger "for the famine had grown severe throughout the world." (*Gn* 41, 57). Joseph's agricultural wisdom made the Egyptian land a place of convergence, a place of welcome and a model of economic solidarity. Joseph realised God's dream in the elaboration of adequate and concrete solutions capable of generating common good for a humanity in need.

Joseph's brothers also came to the land of Egypt: he recognised them among the many refugees who arrived



there after having faced exhausting and dangerous journeys by land and possibly by sea. Joseph embraces his refugee brothers, dissolving in forgiveness every grudge and bigotry. In the Egyptian land, cultivated and cared for by Joseph, another type of food is now shared, indispensable for the survival of humanity: the strong and tender grain of fraternal reconciliation, taken from the granary of God's mercy.

- *Has the Word of God led me to be merciful, to forgive those who have offended me, to seek the common good?*

THE WORD OF GOD SUSTAINS US IN THE JOURNEY

"God called to him from the middle of the bush. 'Moses, Moses!' he said. 'Here I am' he answered. 'Come no nearer' he said. 'Take off your shoes....'" (Ex 3:4-5). Moses, the pilgrim *par excellence* towards the Promised Land, reveals what it means to journey, within the confines of human precariousness, with a liberating God and a people called to freedom. In his vocation, Moses understands that his own life will be an unpredictable journey, impossible to plan in detail: "*Pilgrim,*

your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; pilgrim, there is no road, the road is made by walking" (Antonio Machado).

In order to be able to walk to the rhythm of God's heart, in the vulnerability we experienced as a Church and as families during the Covid-19 pandemic, we are called to do as Moses did, to take off our sandals: to give up the rigidity of our views and soften them in the fire of God's tenderness. Even the revelation of God's name does not reveal everything about the identity of the One who is calling Moses. God is always beyond all our understanding: we walk within the precariousness of what we seem to have understood about God. Our journey as a Church and as families will need the muscles of humility, friendliness, and amiability. Thinking about the power of Egypt, Moses is aware of his own inadequacy, yet he walks up to Pharaoh and intercedes for God's people.

The journey through the desert further highlights the precariousness of walking towards the Promised Land; yet, even in the desert God cares for his people: "In the waste lands he adopts him, in the howling desert of the wilderness. He protects him, rears him, guards him as the pupil of

his eye.” (Dt 32:10). After spending his whole life to reach it, Moses cannot enter the Promised Land: he contemplates it from afar, accepting that others will take his place. Moses understands that the ‘Promised Land’ is hope for pilgrims, wayfarers, who know how to look ahead, who have a vision, for the sake of others.

- *How have I felt assisted, strengthened, supported by God’s Word in difficult times?*

THE WORD OF GOD INSTILS HOPE

“Sir leave it one more year” (Lk 13:8). In the parable of the evangelist Luke, it is told that although the owner of a vineyard had planted a fig tree in a fertile soil like that of the vines, the fig tree did not bear any fruit. Thanks to the intervention of the vinedresser (a wonderful figure of Christ), the fig tree will be pruned and fertilised in the hope that it will bear fruit. With the scarcity of fertilisers that existed at that time, only the vines were fertilised; certainly not the figs, which generally grow and bear fruit in poor and rocky soils: this is one more element that can help us appreciate the surprising love of the vinedresser for this fig tree.

“One more year”...with these words, the Gospel succeeds in communicating how the patience of the Father, ‘invoked’ by the Son, is capable of offering a new possibility of life just when the fate of that plant seems already sealed. Similarly, the daily life we are given to live, as Church and as families, is a time of mercy, of patience on God’s part, even when...we do not bear fruit.

“Sir leave it one more year”...with these words the Gospel designates a specific time in order to motivate us, as Church and as a Family, to rediscover the urgency of reforming our daily attitudes, examining the inclinations of our hearts. It instils joy to know that there is a Vinedresser who, in addition to dedicating himself to the great and fruitful vineyard, will also take the time to patiently hoe around our daily ecclesial and family life, which may happen to be like that fig tree: incapable of bearing fruit. To bear fruit is not the most urgent thing for the Church and the Family; rather it is to learn daily to allow ourselves to be touched by Jesus and his love for us, just as we are now.

- *This year, have I allowed Jesus, the Word Incarnate, to enter the depths of my heart in order to transform it?*

Only Those Who Listen Can Truly Proclaim: The Word of God and Catechesis in Light of the New Directory

The Word of God is the daily bread, which regenerates and uninterruptedly nourishes the ecclesial journey. The ministry of the Word, therefore, is born of listening and educates in the art of listening, because only those who listen can also proclaim. "All evangelisation is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The Sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelisation" (EG 174)." (Directory for Catechesis 283)

The new *Directory for Catechesis*, published by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation on 25th June 2020, addressing the theme of the transmission of the Gospel – the mandate entrusted by the Lord Jesus to his Church (cf. Mt 28:18-20) – highlights that this task is accomplished by transmitting the Word of God orally (*Tradition*) and in writing (*Sacred Scripture*). It cannot be forgotten that the Church can be at the service of the Word of God and proclaim it effectively to the world, insofar as she knows, before others, how to hear “*the word of God with reverence*” (DV 1).

In this regard, taking up the words of Benedict XVI, the *Directory*, at n. 283, recalls that “the Church is built upon the word of God; she is born from and lives by that word. Throughout its history, the People of God have always found strength in the word of God, and today also the ecclesial community grows by hearing, celebrating and studying that word” (VD 3). In these

words, we seem to hear the heartfelt invitation of St Paul VI, who, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stated:

“The Church is an evangeliser, but she begins by being evangelised herself. As a community of believers, as a community of hope that is lived and shared, as a community of fraternal love, the Church needs to listen constantly to what she must believe, to the reasons for her hope, to the new commandment of love.... She always needs to be evangelised if she is to retain freshness, impetus and strength to proclaim the Gospel.” (n. 15)

The Church, in each of the phases of the evangelisation, proclaims the Word of God to all humanity, thus expressing a **ministry**, which “is born from listening and educates believers in the art of listening” to the Word (cf. DC 283). Among the various forms in which this **ministry of the Word** can be exercised (cf. DC 37), stands service of catechesis, in the plurality of types in which it can be carried out: the first

proclamation, catechesis of Christian initiation, ongoing catechesis, etc. In the life of the Christian community, catechesis has the task of being the 'sounding board' of the Word of God in the hearts of men and women, helping each one to enter into an intimate and loving dialogue with God, through his incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Risen and Living, the only one who can respond to our deepest desires and aspirations (cf. *DC* 53-54, 91-92). Catechesis, therefore, cannot be understood without starting from its vital link with the Word of God, which constitutes its deepest foundation.

In outlining the objectives of catechesis, the *Directory* states: "A dynamic and complex reality at the service of the Word of God, it is accompaniment, education, and formation in the faith and for the faith, an introduction to the celebration of the Mystery, illumination and interpretation of human life and history" (n. 55).

- In the first place, in fact, **catechesis stands as a path of accompaniment and education in the faith**, both of those who do not yet know the Lord and of those who have already adhered to him and have manifested a desire to follow him more closely (cf. *DC* 80).
- Secondly, **catechesis opens up to the celebration of the Mystery** through the experience of the liturgy, the sacraments, prayer and popular piety: in this way, the baptised gain a living and effective experience of God's grace and continue to nourish themselves and grow in discipleship (cf. *DC* 81-82, 86-87, 286).
- Third, catechesis progressively helps Christians **to comprehend and interpret human life and history in the light of faith**, allowing their way of thinking, judging and acting to be shaped by the Holy Spirit and to become increasingly conformed to the new life of the Risen Lord (cf. *DC* 83-85).
- Fourth, catechesis **introduces the children of God into the life of the ecclesial community** where, living fraternal relationships in the sign of love and sharing, they become witnesses of the Lord in the world, ready to proclaim as missionary disciples the joy of having met him (cf. *DC* 88-89, 284).

In each of these areas – the proclamation of faith, initiation into the celebration of the Mystery, formation of conscience, community life and missionary zeal – catechesis cannot but refer to Sacred Scripture, because



of its particular relationship with the Word of God. Scripture, which “reaches the depths of the human spirit better than any other word” (DC 91), is “essential for making progress in the life of faith” (DC 74). For this reason, catechesis strives to introduce the faithful concretely to the knowledge of the pages of the Old and New Testaments, which are fundamental for understanding the stages of salvation history with its events and protagonists. Familiarity with the Sacred Text, always read and meditated upon in the faith and in the Tradition of the Church, opens the heart of the baptised person to the knowledge of the *mirabilia Dei* (‘the wonders of God’) and teaches him or her to perceive the Lord alive and at work in the world. Dwelling in the folds of the events and characters of the Bible makes possible that slow inner transformation of the disciple who, seduced by the voice of the Master and together with him, make of their own life a gift for their brothers and sisters.

In order for catechists to become companions of their brothers and sisters in the wonderful experience of knowing and following the Lord, it is necessary that they first grow in listening to the Word of God. To this end, the *Directory* does not forget to

emphasise **the importance of the biblical formation of catechists** (cf. DC 143-144), which will allow them to know ever more intimately the One whom in faith they have already accepted as Lord. To make every effort, both in the parish community and in the diocesan community, to provide Bible courses, days or weeks of study and in-depth study of a book



of Scripture, moments of *Lectio Divina* and meditation on the sacred pages, is perhaps, among pastoral activities, the ones that most effectively allow the seed of faith to take deep root and bear fruit for the future.

A way for biblical formation is *Biblical Catechesis*, which can be implemented in parishes or in groups, associations and ecclesial movements.

It aims to make known the *works* and *words* with which God has revealed himself to humanity in its concrete history. The *method* for carrying it out can be summarised schematically in the following steps:

1. The catechist chooses a **biblical text**, taking into account the needs of the participants or the path they have chosen to follow. After invoking





the Holy Spirit with a prayer or a song, the passage is proclaimed slowly and in a clear voice.

2. The catechist leaves time for the **personal reading of the text**, inviting the participants to *look at the life situation of the characters, the dialogues between them, the actions carried out by the characters, the events of the personal or communal history* to which the story alludes. Each participant should take note of what he or she observes in the text.
3. The catechist then invites participants to **share** the fruit of their observation, seeking the contribution of everyone.
4. **The catechist guides the group's reflection**, highlighting those aspects of the story that will lead to the *discovery of the works and words* through which God has revealed himself to humanity in his or her personal history and in the history of the community.
5. The catechist proposes a series of **questions** so that each of the participants may *become aware of the works and words by which God has made himself known* and revealed his love and closeness, especially in the most difficult situations of their own particular

lives. The catechist also arouses in all participants a **commitment to act and speak** as God has done with them.

6. In the concluding moment of **prayer**, the catechist invites all participants to entrust in God's hands all the commitments made during catechesis.

Here is **an example** of Biblical Catechesis, using the Gospel passage of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman.

1. After an invocation to the Holy Spirit, the text of John 4:5-42 is proclaimed.
2. Time is left for personal reading and meditation on the text, looking at the situation of Jesus, the situation of the Samaritan woman, the dialogues between them, the actions that each of them performs, the historical events alluded to, the change in the Samaritan woman and her fellow villagers.
3. Participants share aspects of the previous point that they were able to identify.
4. Some elements for deepening the biblical text:
 - Jesus, like many people tired of walking, seeks rest, tries to regain his strength and sits near a well.

It is the hour of the most intense heat: loneliness and need come together in this moment (v. 6).

- Jesus breaks the stereotypes and asks a Samaritan woman to give him a drink (vv. 7-9). God always takes the initiative, he humbly approaches us in the crucial situations of our existence in order to enter into dialogue with us and lead us to discover his loving presence in us, as well as in the history of humanity. In this way, humanity can realise that only he can give us what we truly desire in the depths of our hearts (vv. 10-26).
- Impressed by the works and words of Jesus, the Samaritan woman wonders if it is he the awaited Messiah and communicates this to the other villagers, men and women who, like her, are excluded from social and religious life, remaining on the margins. They go to meet him, making, afterwards, a personal commitment (vv. 28-30).
- The Samaritans, coming into direct contact with Jesus, believe in him; in his works and words; they have found the Saviour of the world (vv. 39-42).

5. In light of the biblical text, questions like these can be suggested to foster a personal commitment of faith:

- At what times or situations in life have I felt tired, discouraged or unable to continue the journey?
 - Where did I seek rest, where did I go to regain my strength?
 - In those moments or situations did I discover God's presence and was I able to feel loved by him? What people, works, and words made this possible?
 - Do I feel moved to share the experience of his love with others? What works and words can I use to help those who have been marginalised by society or the Church to experience Jesus as their Saviour?
6. The catechesis can be concluded by asking the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the model *par excellence* of those who listen, meditate, welcome and put the Word of God into practice.

The Logo for the *Sunday of the Word of God*

The logo for the *Sunday of the Word of God* is inspired by the Gospel passage of the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24, 13-33) and highlights the theme of the relationship between wayfarers,

expressed in looks, gestures and words. Jesus appears as the one who “came up and walked by” humanity (*Lk* 24:15), “[living] among us” (*Jn* 1:14).



The Disciples

“Two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus” (Lk 24:13). In the two disciples, Luke captures the face of all believers. Attention to the mutuality between masculine and feminine, which is found throughout the writings of Luke, has led some exegetes to see them as a couple, identifying the anonymous disciple as the wife of Cleopas.

The Risen One

With discretion, Jesus places himself on our path, ‘puts himself in the middle’, living our history, our questions. He questions and listens to those who keep it in the silence of their hearts: “Jesus him self came up and walked by their side” (Lk 24:16).

The Light

As the sun sets, another light warms the hearts of the disciples: the light of the Word. In the Eucharistic act there is full communion with the Master: “And their eyes were opened and they recognised him” (Lk 24:31).

The Star

Pointed to by the Risen One, it is the sign of Evangelisation: “Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.” (Lk 24:35).



The Scroll

In the dialogue between the Old and New Testaments the mystery of salvation is revealed. “Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages through out the scriptures that were about himself.” (Lk 24:27).

The Feet

The Risen One shares the steps of man and the power of his Word; he knows how to point them in the right direction because “Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.” (Ps 118:105). For this, “that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem” (Lk 24:33).

The Walking Stick

Weak and insecure like all human certainties, it expresses the frailty of the disciples who “stopped short, their faces downcast” (Lk 24:17). The Risen One gives them strength with the Word “cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely... it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.” (Heb 4:12).



Abbreviations

Sacred Scripture

<i>Ac</i>	Acts of the Apostles
<i>2 Co</i>	2 Corinthians
<i>Dt</i>	Deuteronomy
<i>Ex</i>	Exodus
<i>Ezek</i>	Ezekiel
<i>Ga</i>	Galatians
<i>Gn</i>	Genesis
<i>Hab</i>	Habakkuk
<i>Heb</i>	Hebrews
<i>Is</i>	Isaiah
<i>Jn</i>	John
<i>Jr</i>	Jeremiah
<i>Lk</i>	Luke
<i>Lv</i>	Leviticus
<i>Mk</i>	Mark

<i>Mt</i>	Matthew
<i>Ne</i>	Nehemiah
<i>1 P</i>	1 Peter
<i>Ph</i>	Philippians
<i>Ps</i>	Psalms
<i>Rm</i>	Romans
<i>Rv</i>	Revelation

Other abbreviations

<i>CL</i>	Christifideles Laici (John Paul II)
<i>DC</i>	Directory for Catechesis (PCPNE)
<i>DV</i>	Dei Verbum (Vatican II)
<i>EG</i>	Evangelii Gaudium (Francis)
<i>L SI'</i>	Laudato Si' (Francis)
<i>LG</i>	Lumen Gentium (Vatican II)
<i>SC</i>	Sacrosanctum Concilium (Vatican II)
<i>VD</i>	Verbum Domini (Benedict XVI)