

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today is the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, which is now designated as the Sunday of the Word of God. This significant observance in the Catholic Church, celebrated on the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time each year, was instituted by Pope Francis with his apostolic letter *Aperuit illis* on September 30, 2019. The observance aims to deepen the appreciation, love, and faithful witness to God and His Word, encouraging the faithful to a renewed encounter with the Sacred Scriptures.

We can understand the phrase, “The Word of God,” in two senses. In one sense, “The Word of God” is Jesus Himself, as we hear in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John: “In the beginning^{*} was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” To grow in appreciation of the Word of God is grow in appreciation of Jesus Himself.

The phrase, “The Word of God,” is also understood in a second sense, namely, the Word of God as recorded in the books of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament. These two understandings of the phrase, The Word of God, are related to each other, because it is through the Sacred Scriptures of the Bible that we come to know Jesus, the Word of God. Saint Jerome famously said, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” Commenting on this statement of Saint Jerome, Pope Benedict XVI said in his General Audience on November 7, 2007;

It is therefore important that every Christian live in contact and in personal dialogue with the Word of God given to us in Sacred Scripture. This dialogue with Scripture must always have two dimensions: on the one hand, it must be a truly personal dialogue because God speaks with each one of us through Sacred Scripture and it has a message for each one. We must not read Sacred Scripture as a word of the past but as the Word of God that is also addressed to us, and we must try to understand what it is that the Lord wants to tell us. However, to avoid falling into individualism, we must bear in mind that the Word of God has been given to us precisely in order to build communion and to join forces in the truth on our journey towards God. Thus, although it is always a personal Word, it is also a Word that builds community, that builds the Church. We must therefore read it in communion with the living Church. The privileged

place for reading and listening to the Word of God is the liturgy, in which, celebrating the Word and making Christ's Body present in the Sacrament, we actualize the Word in our lives and make it present among us. We must never forget that the Word of God transcends time. Human opinions come and go. What is very modern today will be very antiquated tomorrow. On the other hand, the Word of God is the Word of eternal life, it bears within it eternity and is valid for ever. By carrying the Word of God within us, we therefore carry within us eternity, eternal life.¹

In the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis establishing the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time as The Sunday of the Word of God, Pope Francis said:

The Second Vatican Council gave great impulse to the rediscovery of the word of God, thanks to its Dogmatic Constitution [*Dei Verbum*](#), a document that deserves to be read and appropriated ever anew. The Constitution clearly expounds the nature of sacred Scripture, its transmission from generation to generation (Chapter II), its divine inspiration (Chapter III) embracing the Old and New Testaments (Chapters IV and V), and the importance of Scripture for the life of the Church (Chapter VI). To advance this teaching, Pope Benedict XVI convoked an [Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church"](#), and then issued the Apostolic Exhortation [*Verbum Domini*](#), whose teaching remains fundamental for our communities. That

document emphasizes in particular the performative character of the Word of God, especially in the context of the liturgy, in which its distinctively sacramental character comes to the fore.

It is fitting, then that the life of our people be constantly marked by this decisive relationship with the living word that the Lord never tires of speaking to his Bride, that she may grow in love and faithful witness.

Consequently, I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This *Sunday of the Word of God* will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the *Sunday of the Word of God* has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity.

Pope Francis then went on to explain the close connection between the Word of God in Sacred Scripture and the Word of God who is Jesus Christ:

7. The Bible, as sacred Scripture, thus speaks of Christ and proclaims him as the one who had to endure suffering and then enter into his glory (cf. v. 26). Not simply a part, but the whole of Scripture speaks of Christ. Apart from the Scriptures, his death and resurrection cannot be rightly understood. That is why one of the most ancient confessions of faith stressed that

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas” (1Cor15:3-5). Since the Scriptures everywhere speak of Christ, they enable us to believe that his death and resurrection are not myth but history, and are central to the faith of his disciples.

A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ (cf. *Rom 10:17*), believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the Lord, both in the celebration of the liturgy and in their personal prayer and reflection.

8. The journey that the Risen Lord makes with the disciples of Emmaus ended with a meal. The mysterious wayfarer accepts their insistent request: “Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day is now far spent” (*Lk 24:29*). They sit down at table, and Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and offers it to them. At that moment, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him (cf. v. 31).

This scene clearly demonstrates the unbreakable bond between sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “the Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she has venerated the Lord’s body, in that she never ceases, above all in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the

bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the body of Christ" ([*Dei Verbum*](#), 21).

Regular reading of sacred Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist make it possible for us to see ourselves as part of one another. As Christians, we are a single people, making our pilgrim way through history, sustained by the Lord, present in our midst, who speaks to us and nourishes us. A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a year-long event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord, who continues to speak his word and to break bread in the community of believers. For this reason, we need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness.

Sacred Scripture and the sacraments are thus inseparable. When the sacraments are introduced and illumined by God's word, they become ever more clearly the goal of a process whereby Christ opens our minds and hearts to acknowledge his saving work. We should always keep in mind the teaching found in the Book of Revelation: the Lord is standing at the door and knocking. If anyone should hear his voice and open for him, he will come in and eat with them (cf. 3:20). 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.²

In today's first reading, Isaiah proclaims, "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light." In the Gospel, Matthew echoes Isaiah's prophecy - but the Messiah, the Christ, is already present. The response to the Psalm, with its focus on light, links the two readings: "The Lord is my light and salvation." As a result, the psalmist has only one longing in his heart, a longing that we all share as believers in the Word of God: "One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord."

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20071107.html

² [Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio of the Supreme Pontiff Francis "Aperuit illis" \(30 September 2019\)](#)