



FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

«Remain in my word»

(Jn. 8:31)

Liturgical and Pastoral Handbook



DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION
SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD

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Introduction

The biblical expression with which this year's Sunday of the Word of God is intended to be celebrated is taken from the Gospel according to John: «Remain in my word» (Jn. 8:31). One of the most exhilarating facts in the history of the people of Israel is certainly that of how the privileged medium by which God addresses, both individuals and the collective, remains that of the «word.» To say that God uses the «Word» is also tantamount to saying that God speaks, that is, God breaks the silence and in his love, addresses humanity. The fact that God speaks implies that he intends to communicate something intimate, and absolutely necessary for man, without which he could never come to a full knowledge of himself or the mystery of God. The permanent dialogue between God and man, which characterizes the biblical story, possesses the traits of friendship. It is a personal conversation, touching man in his innermost being and involving him in a loving relationship, reaching out to each one in their own story to be close to them.

The fundamental fact that unsettles history, giving it a different orientation is this: in Jesus Christ God speaks fully and definitively to humanity. He is the Word made flesh, the Word that has always been spoken and now also becomes visible. What is made known to men is the Word, the Logos, eternal life...all terms that refer back to the central and foundational idea: the person of Jesus Christ. Then these words that Jesus, in John's Gospel, addresses to all of us believers in Him, become very significant: «Remain in my word» (Jn. 8:31). It is the invitation not to scatter, but to «remain in him» in a deep and radical unity like that of the branches to the vine (see Jn. 15:1-7). In the Fourth Gospel, the verb «remain» has a paradigmatic meaning. To remain in the Word of God is much more than a hasty or even fortuitous encounter. *Dei Verbum* explains it wonderfully: «out of the abundance of His love [He] speaks to men as friends» (*Dei Verbum*, 2). God not only speaks to men, but remains with them for a long time, as if they were real «friends» whom he has known for a long time; God «enjoys his time» with us, stays to share joys and sorrows and give life a sense of fullness that cannot be found elsewhere. In his Word, God enlightens us with the «light of life» (Jn. 8:12), as Bishop Augustine well states: «*if you abide in my word, you will really be my disciples, so that you may contemplate the truth as it is; not conveyed by the sound of words, but by the brilliance of light, when God will satisfy us, as we read in the psalm, The light of your countenance has been imprinted on us, Lord (Ps. 4:6)*».

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter at the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy, desired that «every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. It would be a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people» (*Misericordia et misera*, 7). With the Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis*, Pope Francis instituted the Sunday of the Word of God, arranging its celebration on the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time. It should not be overlooked that the Sunday of the Word of God takes place at a time when the Church celebrates the Day of Dialogue

between Jews and Catholics and the Week of Christian Unity, giving it great ecumenical and communion significance. Indeed, Sacred Scripture has always been a bridge of dialogue and important contact with other Christian denominations and religions as well. In addition, the Gospels on this Sunday, in all three liturgical cycles, relate the beginning of the ministry and preaching of Jesus, the Word made flesh.

It is a profoundly pastoral initiative with which Pope Francis wants to make it clear how important it is in the daily life of the Church and our communities to refer to the Word of God, a Word that is not confined to a book, but which remains ever alive and becomes a concrete and tangible sign. Each local community will be able to find the most suitable and effective ways to live this Sunday to the fullest, helping the people of God «to grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the sacred Scriptures» (*Aperuit illis*, 15). This Pastoral Handbook is intended to help and be offered to parish communities and those gathered for Sunday's Eucharistic celebration, so that this Sunday may be resolutely lived.

The Sunday of the Word of God allows Christians to reinvigorate once again Jesus' tenacious invitation to listen to and cherish his Word, in order to offer the world a witness of hope that will enable them to move beyond the difficulties of the present moment. In the journey Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to take toward the Jubilee of 2025, whose motto is *Pilgrims of Hope*, the Sunday of the Word of God becomes a crucial step. Indeed, the hope that flows from this Word prompts every community not only to proclaim the same faith as always, but above all to communicate it with the conviction that it brings hope to those who hear and welcome it with a simple heart.

✠ Rino Fisichella

Pro-Prefect for the Dicastery for Evangelization

Section for the Fundamental Questions Regarding Evangelization in the World

Practical Considerations

Preparing the Sunday of the Word of God

To actively experience the *Sunday of the Word of God*, it is important that preparations extend from the spiritual level (personal and community prayer) to the material level (adequate planning).

Indeed, fostering an encounter with God in His Word requires adequate spiritual preparation, calling for openness of heart for those to whom the Word will be proclaimed. Accordingly, preparations for planning the initiative call for starting with individual and communal prayer.

SUGGESTIONS:

- A week before the *Sunday of the Word of God*, include an intention dedicated to this goal in the prayer of the faithful.
- Provide a time of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the community, offered for the celebration of the *Sunday of the Word of God*. (cf. pg. 25)
- Have moments of Biblical Catechesis.

Living out the Sunday of the Word of God

Celebrate this Sunday's Mass in a solemn way, according to Pope Francis' request. In fact, the most favourable place of encounter between the Christian community and the Word of God is the Eucharistic celebration. The Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis*, No. 3, outlines some suggestions:

- It will be important that the sacred text can be enthroned in the Eucharistic celebration so that the normative value that the Word of God possesses is made evident to the assembly.
- On this Sunday, especially, it will be helpful to highlight its proclamation and adapt the homily to emphasize the service that is rendered to the Word of the Lord.
- On this Sunday, the Bishops could celebrate the rite of institution of the Ministry of Catechists and also Lector, to recall the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgy.
- The parish priests could find ways of distributing the Bible, or one of its books, to the whole assembly so as to bring out the importance of continuing the daily reading, deepening and prayer with Sacred Scripture, with a special emphasis on lectio divina.
- Make special reference in the prayer of the faithful to Christian unity, since celebrating the Sunday of the Word of God expresses ecumenical significance.



“I would like so much for all Christians to be able to comprehend “the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ” (cf. Phil 3:8) through the diligent reading of the Word of God, for the sacred text is the nourishment of the soul and the pure and perennial source of the spiritual life of all of us. We must therefore make every effort in order that every believer may read the Word of God, for ignorance of the Scriptures is indeed, “ignorance of Christ”, as St Jerome says”.

(Pope Francis)

IN COMMUNITY

It is important to remember that the carrying out of the program is not the ultimate purpose of this Sunday. Rather, we need to foster an ongoing personal and community encounter with the Word of God. We know well that listening, sharing, living and proclaiming the Word of God is not a one-day task, but a task to undertake for our whole life. It might help to promote various Bible initiatives throughout the year and provide an opportunity for ongoing formation of the faithful.

Formation of Lectors

It is essential that church communities engage in training the faithful who carry out the task of lectors in Liturgical Celebrations, so that they may be true proclaimers of the Word with adequate preparation, as is now customary for acolytes or extraordinary ministers of Communion. As stated in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (No. 58):

“All those entrusted with this office, even those not instituted in the ministry of Reader, should be truly suitable and carefully trained. This training should be biblical and liturgical, as well as technical: “The purpose of their



biblical formation is to give readers the ability to understand the readings in context and to perceive by the light of faith central point of the revealed message. The liturgical formation ought to equip readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. The technical preparation should make the readers skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment.”

Carrying the Word «in pocket»

Thus Pope Francis suggests, “[M]ay you have the habit of always carrying a small Gospel in your pocket, in your bag, to be able to read it to during the day”. There are several editions of the New Testament or the Gospel, in handy little volumes, pocket versions, that easily fit in our bags or backpacks and that we can carry with us at all times.

Carrying the Word in Your Cell Phone

One can easily have the Bible in their cell phone to consult it at any time. There are different apps and web sites in different languages, not only with the Bible but also with the Holy Mass readings for each day, pages where to read or listen to the Word of God, pages with commentaries and reflections of the same. One can also use notifications as a reminder to have a moment a day to encounter God's Word so that it accompanies us wherever we go.

Delving deeper into *Dei Verbum*

To delve deeper into this precious document, the Conciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation, we suggest reading the first small volumes of the *Council Notebooks* series, prepared by the Dicastery for Evangelization on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and as preparation for the Jubilee of 2025.

Bible Group

A group could be organized in the church community, on a weekly or monthly basis, that organizes formative or cultural moments of in-depth study of Sacred Scripture, and community *Lectio Divina* moments. For these meetings, one can start from the *Lectio Divina* proposals given in this handbook (cf. pg. 11-20). The meetings should be adapted according to the characteristics of the group (age group, spiritual maturity, etc.).



Visit a Church

For children and young people, one could also suggest a «mystagogical» initiative of this kind: enter a Church in one's diocese that has frescoes, mosaics or stained glass windows and identify the biblical episodes that these tell, dwelling on the details, looks and aspects that may arouse particular curiosity.

Handing out Bible Quotes

Write several Bible quotes (just the abbreviation) on a small piece of paper that can be rolled up; at the end of Mass it can be handed out to the congregants so they can read them at home and share them as a family.

Biblical Exhibits

Biblical exhibits could be made, with visuals, information, historical data and motivation to continue to delve into Scripture.

Meditated Rosary

Another source for praying with Scripture is the variety of traditional Catholic prayers, such as the Rosary. It is an evangelical prayer with a distinct Christological orientation, defined by St. John Paul II as a «compendium of the

Gospel.» In fact, it has an essentially contemplative character, since it leads us into the meditation of the mysteries of the Lord's life, accompanied by the one who was closest to the Lord. To give biblical foundation and greater depth to the meditation, it is helpful if the announcement of the mystery is followed by the proclamation of a corresponding biblical passage. It is appropriate that after the announcing of the mystery and the proclamation of the Word, one should pause for a suitable period of time to fix one's gaze on the meditated mystery, before beginning the vocal prayer (cf. Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, No. 30-31).

IN THE FAMILY

A favourable place for the transmission and reception of faith is one's own family, where from generation to generation one shares experientially what one has received, that is, the convictions and certainties that flow from one's own experience. Gathering around the table of God's Word enriches and strengthens the experience of the family as a «domestic Church».

Set aside some family time for a short reading of a Scripture passage, for example, the Sunday Gospel. Choose a comfortable and quiet place in the home, away from the distractions of television and cell phones. Begin with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to God's Word. Read the passage aloud and then allow some time for the family to reflect and share their impressions. Finish with a prayer together that this Word will bear fruit in our lives, helping us in the walk toward holiness.

- Assign a family member to collect artistic images that convey and express the biblical themes of a particular passage of Scripture. These images (a painting, a sculpture, a stained glass window, or even a piece of sacred music) can serve as a reference point for reflecting on the Word of God which takes artistic form in the Christian tradition.
- A moment of passing over the Word to the children.
- Praying the Rosary as a family.
- Watching movies, Bible series (such as *The Chosen*) and cartoons together for younger children. There can be a time of sharing afterwards, in which everyone shares their opinion about what they watched or some passage or scene is explained or elaborated on.



*«Christian meditation, led by the Spirit, leads us to this dialogue with Jesus.
There is no page of the Gospel in which there is no place for us. For us Christians,
meditating is a way to encounter Jesus».*

(Pope Francis)



Every believer's contact with Holy Scripture is an encounter always desired by the soul that thirsts for God. Like a flower opening up to the sun, so the human heart exposes itself to the breath of the divine Inspirer of human words which he takes up and transforms into those of God.

A confident openness: I too can always please God!

The "touch" of the Spirit immediately features in our text from the very first words of Jesus. The soul is immediately lifted to the heights of the originating intimacy from which the Messiah came and where his messages, destined to resonate throughout human history, were formed. Indeed, this *lectio divina* begins with a mysterious promise of precise understanding of Christ's identity, his mission and words, and him being eternally under the "Father's delight":

"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him'. Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him." (Jn. 8:28-30)

The prospect of a mysterious "rising" that can only be later identified with the crucifixion, is striking. This will be the astounding "place" of the epiphany of a rejected but always faithful love, as only that of "He who is" can be. Already with these first words the heart is immediately placed in the birthplace of Christ's own words: they are certainly human, but their origin is divine: "I say only what the Father taught me."

From these first few words we get a glimpse of the key to union with God in the practicalities of life: "do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). The Father's delight, His blessing smile toward His sons and daughters is not just a settling of accounts, but rather God's own happiness that is poured out on His beloved creatures, on their deepest longings, especially when they are subjected to "existential upliftments," with the afflictions of various daily crucifixions.

With pen in hand...

It is appropriate to note the setting of the scene, since the Bible is read not only with the eyes but with pen in hand (Carlo M. Martini). Chapter eight of John's gospel-with its 15 verses (8:28-42)-places the reader in the context of confrontation and growing tension in which Jesus finds himself, engaged in the temple and its surroundings to bring to completion the revelation of his Person before those who represent the better part of the chosen people: the Pharisees, scribes and Jews.

The latter, according to John's style, are the highest authorities of Israel. And it is precisely with these increasingly disapproving Jews that the confrontation intensifies dramatically. Jesus, who at first introduces himself as "I am," will be forced - despite an initial adherence to the Jews' faith - to experience the murderous intentions of those who profess to be children of Abraham and children of God. In fact, Jesus' words, interrupted in verse 42, follow with unprecedented drama



that sounds like a prelude to the Passover that is now near. This is felt in the Lord's unexpected "lament" that denounces:

"Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word. You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jn. 8:43-44)

God's Truth - The only source of joyful freedom

"Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" (Jn. 8:31-32). Jesus speaks here to those who have become his disciples. He proposes to them an extended journey: one must *remain* in his word, in a continuous existential sense.

The word of Christ is not primarily an object of study or a subject of discussions reserved for specialists (such as the Pharisees and scribes). It is a "remaining" comparable to continuously "breathing in" the divine oxygen of Jesus's word that coincides with a growing intimacy modeled after that between the Father and the Son, which is denoted in the opening words. It is in this "place" that the existential assimilation of Truth takes place. In this relationship is played out the "true discipleship" that Jesus would define as "friendship." Only such a way of remaining in his word can reveal its content, message and vital energy: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." (Jn. 15:15).

In this way, according to John, thanks to Jesus we come to the knowledge of the Truth that is, the ultimate knowledge of God who manifests to humanity his origin and final destination (the Trinity).

Jesus - Light of Truth shining in the darkness

The Messiah's invitation to remain in his word begins to resonate already in the previous chapter. Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, and his teaching (7:1-24) pro-



vokes discussion about the origin of the Messiah (7:25-30). He chooses this moment to announce his imminent departure (7:31-36), which, though dramatic, will coincide with the opening of the eternal rivers of living water (7:37-39).

Such a promise, however, will not appease the confrontation over the origin of the Messiah (7:40-53), unfortunately based on a mere socio-geographical criterion. “[N]o prophet arises from Galilee,” assert the objectors (7:52), perhaps even malevolent in their subtle allusion to Jesus’s misunderstood conception before the formalization of marriage: “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” (8:41).

But John knows this from the prologue of his gospel: “the light shines in the darkness” (Jn. 1:5). The Truth of God will shine in the darkness of this shocking rejection, giving rise to an unforeseen epiphany of the Love that corresponds to God himself. For only God, in the crucified Messiah, will know how to love by crossing even the human dimensions of pain and meaninglessness caused by sin and rejection.



In this human hell, Truth will shine even more brightly with its saving light and energy. It is the splendor of the free giving proper to the Gift that is God Himself. Like the Holy Spirit after Jesus’s Passover, this *splendor of free self-giving* is poured out on the disciples at Pentecost, marking a new beginning of Life with a sun that never sets.

Together in the “today” of grace - freed to be fulfilled in giving

The *lectio divina* of Jn. 8:28-42 here opens the heart’s inner gaze to the mystery of salvation. The original sonship between the Creator and Adam in the stillness of paradise was blurred by rebellion, caused by the envy of the ancient Serpent (cf. Wis. 2:24). Thus, God’s fatherhood was also blurred. The vision of God, the world and man himself was clothed in suspicion and resulted in a hostility of creation, increasing violence in humanity and a silence of Heaven...

Only a new creative word of the Father could restore life to a reality marked by death. The divine

Logos who knows no darkness, the beloved Son, was “spoken” and sent, in the incarnation to shine in the night of the world, manifesting the Creator’s faithfulness to his beloved creation. In order for man to understand this and to be born again even more beautiful than in the first creation, the Son of Man had to enter into the death of every sense and every relationship, continuing to love even as he descended to the underworld of human existence far from the Father’s heart. Therein lies the deliverance *from evil*, which Jesus taught us to ask for at the end of the “Our Father,” but even more so the deliverance to be in a giving predisposition and thus find ourselves in a collective “we”: a reflection of the Trinity.

Remaining in the Word - remaining in Jesus

Jesus revealed to us today that “Place” from which he came and to which he returns, in his Passover, together with us: “The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him.” (8:29). “To be with Him” forever - that is humanity’s destiny, made accessible again to all who remain in His Word.

It is the synthesis of the entire gospel: *remaining in the Word* correlates with *remaining in Jesus*, as he remains in the Father. It is “living in Christ,” following him closely, toward the new creation that originated on the cross, participating in his epiphany of unfading Love..

In the encounter with this Truth is the answer to the question that underlies all Christian action: can man fully express his freedom in the free gift of self? The answer is found in Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates [(loses)] his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” (Jn. 12:25).

Lord, you reaffirm to each of us,

«Remain in me, as I remain in you.» (Jn. 15:4).

We ask you for the grace to put our full trust in your words,

which have now become our life.

Grant that in constantly offering ourselves for the life of the world,

as you did, we may be your friends. In this way, we will always

be enveloped in the light from your words and warmed by their grace,

permanently abiding in you who are the Word of the Father,

full of the Spirit of Love.

Amen.

“Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are”: goes a well-known proverb. Simplifying this Sunday’s complex Gospel passage (Jn. 8:28-42), one could say that Jesus gives a similar speech to a group of Jews, who had begun to follow him as their teacher in life: “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (8:31). In other words, “If you trust in what I tell you and become my disciples, you too will become *like me*.” And what does one become, when one follows Jesus? One becomes a *free person*: “if the Son makes you free,” he explains, “you will be free indeed.” (8:36; cf. v. 32).

Concerning freedom, however, we cannot cheat! Today, there is a popular way of understanding it that is not Christ’s way. After all, in our culture, when we talk about *freedom*, it is almost always believed to be *doing what you want*.

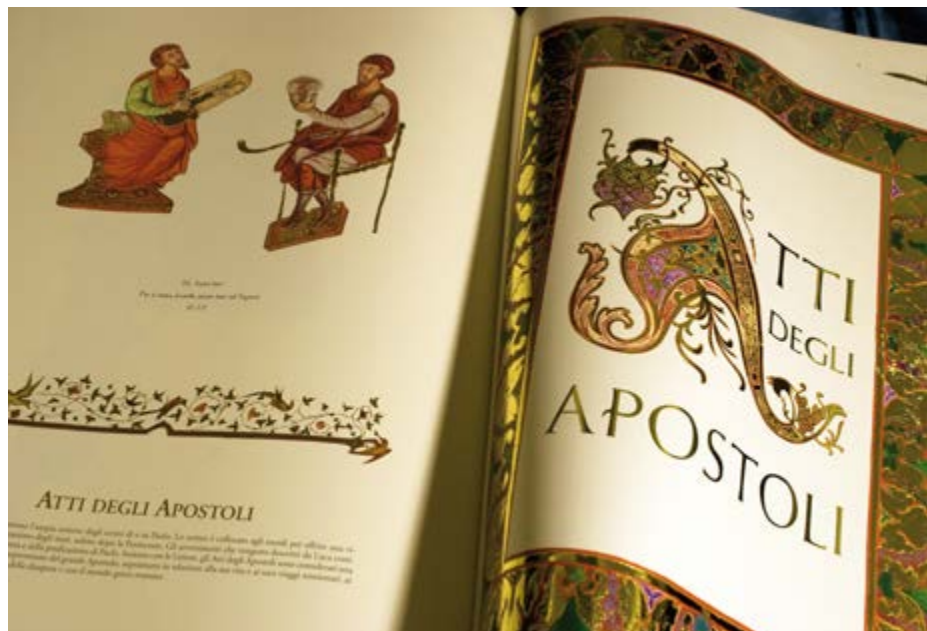
If I asked one of you what it means to be free, I am sure someone would answer, “I am free when I can do what I want.” We can certainly sense that this definition of freedom is naive. In school or in some formative parish meeting, we are capable of discussing at length about the insidious socio-economic conditioning that undermines our freedom. Meanwhile, however, when we make certain decisions, we also obey this kind of contemporary dogma: “It is I who decide for myself.” We are so captivated by it that we assume that this also applies in our relationship with God.

It is the conviction that, for example, atheist existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre placed on the lips of the protagonist of the play *The Flies*, who yells at his god, “It is the conviction that, for example, atheist existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre placed on the lips of the protagonist of the play *The Flies*, who yells at his god, “I *am* my freedom! No sooner had you created me than I ceased to be yours ... I shall not return under your law ... For I am a man ..., and every man must find out his own way.”

In the Gospel, however, Christ presents us with another idea of freedom, diametrically opposed to that prevalent in our society, according to which, except for the rights of others, one would not be obliged to answer to anyone else for one’s choices. Instead, Jesus promises his disciples – from yesterday and today, “*You will become free to the extent that you remain in my word*” (cf. Jn. 8:31-32).

Beyond Jesus’ bitter dispute with the Jews about being descendants of Abraham, which marks this Gospel passage, let us try to bring its revelation about freedom to our current context:

“Do you want to be free?” – Jesus seems to teach us – “Let the gospel determine your life. Stop naively imagining that you can do whatever you want, because, truth be told, those who follow me cannot behave that way. Whoever decides to be my disciple can only do good, even at the



cost of paying for it personally in terms of energy, time, affection and even money. So, do you still want to be my disciple? Surrender your life to me! Keep believing that in me you will find the ultimate goodness of your existence; bet on love as I did (cf. 13:34; 15:12). If you are in, I promise you genuine freedom, with which you can come to the kind of ‘God-love’ (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16). If instead, you want to do what you want, I am sorry, but you will never be truly free; you will instead become a slave to your ‘I’ and, in the end, to your own sin” (cf. 8:34).

Paraphrased in this way, the Gospel of this Sunday’s Word of God no longer seems as far removed from our lives as it probably seemed at first. Far from it: it becomes a real challenge. So much so that, even in Christ’s day, the group of Jews who had also initially believed in him (8:31) immediately reacted harshly to these words of his, passing into the ranks of his adversaries: “They answered him, ‘We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, “You will become free”? ’” (8:33).



However, by what right can Christ claim that our freedom depends on obedience to his word? How can we argue the objection of his opponents, which, after all, coincides with that of so many of our contemporaries who have turned away from him and the Church?

In an interview with Vatican Radio, Pope Benedict XVI explained that “the generally widespread idea is that Christians have to observe an endless amount of commandments, prohibitions, principles and the like, and that therefore Christianity is something exhausting and oppressive to live and that one is freer without all these burdens.”

How can we respond to those who think this way? Even before that, how can we give an account of our hope in Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) to the “unbeliever” who also dwells in our hearts and feels the temptation of “I do what I want” on a daily basis? Benedict XVI once again replied, “[A]t a closer look, the Commandments are the means that the Lord gives us to protect our freedom, both from the internal conditioning of passions and from the external abuse of those with evil intentions. The ‘nos’ of the Commandments are as many ‘yeses’ to the growth of true freedom.”

To comprehend the reason why only in the divine will, which Christ alone has fully and definitively revealed to us, do we find the source of our freedom and happiness, we must remember that we are essentially God’s creation. This means that the only one who really knows what we need to live an authentically human life, or as Jesus liked to say, as “blessed” children (Mt. 5:1-12; Lk. 6:17-23) is God, and not us! In fact, whenever we try to determine what is good and what is evil apart from him, we *slip into the quicksand of sin*. After all, since Adam and Eve (cf. Gen. 3), every sin has always been caused by a lack of faith, which makes us say to ourselves, “God is a dictator father! Why on earth, in order to be happy, must I obey his commandments and the words of his Son (cf. Jn. 8:31)? Am I or am I not free?”

Jesus reveals to us in today's Gospel that it is precisely by reasoning in this way that we end up falling a slave to sin. Undoubtedly, at first, we delude ourselves into thinking that we will obtain our happiness this way. "Finally", we think, "I will be rich and have no more need of anything (cf. Rev. 3:17); I will make a name for myself (cf. Gen. 11:4; Is. 14:13-14); I will satisfy any desire I have" (cf. Ex. 20:17). But then, once and again, it happens, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgement of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself..." (No. 1865) In this way sin tends to reproduce and strengthen itself." In this sense, Jesus revealed to us that sin enslaves those who commit it (cf. Jn. 8:34). Thereafter, as so many biblical pages remind us (cf. Gal. 6:8; Rom. 6:21, 23), our evil acts, though subtle and hidden, always have detrimental consequences, causing other people to suffer: those we intended to harm, but also other innocent people, perhaps among our own loved ones. Moreover, sooner or later, the evil we have committed comes back to us like a *boomerang*, even if only in the form of remorse, often invisible to others, but no less excruciating for us (cf. Ez. 36:31; Mt. 26:75; 27:3-5).

Knowing this dreadful possibility inherent to our freedom, Christ, through whom and for whom we were created by God (cf. Col. 1:16), gives us a most precious suggestion today: "If you want to be free, let me become more and more the ultimate standard of your choices" (cf. Jn. 8:36). This is life's secret: to bet our freedom on the trustworthy God revealed to us by Christ. Living by faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; cf. Hab. 2:4) as Abraham did, thus becoming his descendants (Jn. 8:33, 37). More so: living as children of God (cf. 8:42) as Christ did. How? By meekly allowing ourselves to be led by the Spirit (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15), who breathes especially in the word of Christ (cf. Jn. 6:63; 14:26; 16:14). We will thus come to *recognize with gratitude* that we have received everything from the Father, so we will seek, in full freedom, to bring *his good works* (cf. 3:21; 14:12) to fruition just as the Son did (cf. 5:36; 9:4; 10:31.37; 17:4).

With joy, then, we express in this Eucharist our gratitude to the Father for the gift of *freedom*, which, aided by the Spirit, *we desire to place at his complete service*:

**We thank you, Father,
For you did not create us as puppets without strings,
Obliged to do your will.
Thank you for the immense gift of freedom
And for the restless desire for love
That propels us toward you.**

**Give us, Father, the Holy Spirit,
That he may reinvigorate in us
The choice to obey
The true and liberating word of your Son,
The only way that leads to life with you.**

May it be so for us all.

Lectio Divina for Young People

Mk 1:14-20

In this scripture passage, St. Mark recounts the calling of Simon, Andrew, James, and John, four regular people whom Jesus calls to join him in his mission to make disciples of all nations, to become fishers of men. However, we shouldn't just read this as a story about past events. The call to the mission of evangelization is for all the baptized: "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). We can identify four key themes in this scripture passage: Make, Urgency, Call and Response.

As Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he sees Simon and Andrew fishing. He



calls to them: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mk. 1:17). Jesus knows that he is not calling qualified men to follow him. In fact, Mark makes special note of the fact that "they were fishermen" (Mk. 1:16). Fishermen would not have been expected to be part of the well-educated class of society. They were not scholars of the law or Levites. They were simple, salt-of-the-earth people.

And yet, Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to drop their nets and follow him, promising to make them fishers of people. There is something significant about the use of the word "make" in this phrase. Jesus is not

just calling them to follow him. He is promising that he will form them into the fishers of men that he desires for them to become. To make something requires forethought, planning, and intention. When you want to make something well, you think in advance about how it should be built. There is an end in mind, and planning and forethought that come before the making. In using this term "make," Jesus indicates to Simon and Andrew that he has an end in mind for them: to move from fishermen on the sea to becoming fishers of men for the whole world. There is a common saying that "the Lord doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the called". **Here, we see Jesus calling two seemingly unqualified men on the promise that he will intentionally shape and mould them into the fishers of people he desires for them to become. In prayer, ask the Lord how he is shaping you as a missionary disciple.** Both sets of brothers in Mark's story respond with urgency to the Lord's call to follow him. Mark describes both responses as "immediate" (cf. Mk. 1:18, 20). The use of language evoking a sense of immediacy is characteristic of Mark's Gospel. This shouldn't lead us to think, however, that this is just a literary technique used by Mark. The fact that both sets of brothers were willing to leave their lives as fishermen to follow Jesus immediately should tell us something about the urgency of the mission.

In *Redemptoris Missio*, St. John Paul II wrote of the urgency of the Church's mission:

“The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council, it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity, which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church’s mission is obvious” (Redemptoris Missio, 3).

Redemptoris Missio was written in 1990. For much of the world, certainly in North America and Europe, the number of “those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church” has certainly continued to increase in the last thirty-three years. There are also many places throughout the world where people have never had the opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus. This should spur a renewed sense of urgency for the mission of evangelization. When we consider the vast number of souls who do not embrace the deep, personal, and intimate relationship with all three persons of the Holy Trinity, which is the very purpose of their lives, the urgency for each of us to respond to the call to evangelization should be obvious. Should we think that, perhaps, this urgent call to participate in the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (cf. Mt. 28:19-20) was for the apostles and is not directed at us, we should recall the words of St. Paul VI:

“Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 24).

When Jesus calls, it is personal, unique, urgent and intentional. It was a personal call for these men, and it is a personal call to each of us. With the urgency of the mission in mind, each of us should ask ourselves: how is Jesus calling me to respond with immediacy to join him in making disciples of all nations? You might be hearing this call for the first time, or you might realize that this is what you have been feeling in your heart for a long time, but it’s time to go now.

Pause and put yourself in this scripture passage as you hear the call of Jesus to go: what are you feeling? What are you sensing? How is your heart responding as you are tired, sitting on a boat, and working many long days? What might the Lord be asking you to give up to follow him in this immediacy? It could be something big, like your job, your work, or your family,



but it could also be something else, such as a particular sin in your life, or even something like deleting an app you waste time on so you can spend more time with him, or with a group of friends.

Jesus calls you personally to follow him and invites you to be his missionary disciple today; he calls you where you are; you don't need to be perfect, but like the early apostles, not ready Lord, but willing. This call is not based on your ability or religious devotion but on your willingness to respond. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes:

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt. 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level

of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization...Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization" (No. 120).

This passage calls you today to be a "fisher of people." Reread the scripture and put your name where you read Simon, Andrew, James or John. What is holding you back from immediately responding to Jesus' call to the mission of evangelization? Picture yourself as one of the apostles: when Jesus says to you, "Come follow me," will you immediately follow?



A Catechesis from Pope Francis

Catechesis on prayer with the Sacred Scripture

General Audience, January 27, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to focus on the prayer we can do beginning with a Bible passage. The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart. The Word of God goes to the heart. The Catechism affirms that: “prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture” — the Bible cannot be read like a novel — “so that a dialogue takes place between God and man” (n. 2653). This is where prayer leads you, because it is a dialogue with God. That Bible verse was written for me too, centuries and centuries ago, to bring me a word of God. It was written for each of us. This experience happens to all believers: a passage from Scripture, heard many times already, unexpectedly speaks to me one day, and enlightens a situation that I am living. But it is necessary that I be present on that day for that appointment with the Word. That I be there, listening to the Word. Every day God passes and sows a seed in the soil of our lives. We do not know whether today he will find dry ground, brambles, or good soil that will make that seed grow (cf. Mk. 4: 3-9). That they become for us the living Word of God depends on us, on our prayer, on the open heart with which we approach the Scriptures. God passes continually through Scripture. And here I return to what I said last week, to what Saint Augustine said: “I am afraid of God when he passes”. Why is he afraid? That he will not listen to him. That he will not realize that he is the Lord.

Through prayer a new incarnation of the Word takes place. And we are the “tabernacles” where the words of God seek to be welcomed and preserved, so that they may visit the world. This is why we must approach the Bible without ulterior motives, without exploiting it. The believer does not turn to the Holy Scriptures to support his or her own philosophical and moral view, but because he or she hopes for an encounter; the believer knows that those words were written in the Holy Spirit, and that therefore they should be welcomed and understood in that same Spirit, so that the encounter can occur.

It bothers me a little when I hear Christians who recite verses from the Bible like parrots. “Oh, yes... Oh, the Lord says... He wants this...”. But did you encounter the Lord, with that verse? It is not only a question of memory: it is a question of the memory of the heart, which opens you to the encounter with the Lord. And that word, that verse, leads you to the encounter with the Lord. Thus, we read the Scriptures so that they may “read us”. And it is a grace to be able to recognize



oneself in this passage or that character, in this or that situation. The Bible was not written for a generic humanity, but for us, for me, for you, for men and women in flesh and blood, men and women who have a name and a surname, like me, like you. And when the Word of God, infused with the Holy Spirit, is received with an open heart, it does not leave things as they were before: never. Something changes. And this is the grace and the power of the Word of God.

Christian tradition is rich in experiences and reflections on prayer with the Sacred Scripture. In particular, the **method of “Lectio divina”** was established; it originated in monastic circles, but is now also practised by Christians who frequent their parishes. It is first of all a matter of reading the biblical passage attentively: even more, I would say with “obedience” to the text, to understand what it means in and of itself. One then enters into dialogue with Scripture, so that those words become a cause for meditation and prayer: while remaining faithful to the text, I begin to ask myself what it “says to me”. This is a delicate step: we must not slip into subjective interpretations, but rather become part of the living Tradition, which unites each of us to Sacred Scripture. The last step of Lectio divina is contemplation. Words and thoughts here give way to love, as between lovers for whom sometimes it is enough to just look at each other in silence. The biblical text remains, but like a mirror, like an icon to be contemplated. And in this way,

there is dialogue.

Through prayer, the Word of God comes to abide in us and we abide in it. The Word inspires good intentions and sustains action; it gives us strength and serenity, and even when it challenges us, it gives us peace. On “bad” and confusing days, it guarantees to the heart a core of confidence and of love that protects



it from the attacks of the evil one.

In this way the Word of God is made flesh — allow me to use this expression: made flesh — in those who receive it in prayer. The intuition emerges in some ancient texts that Christians identify so completely with the Word that, even if all the Bibles in the world were to be burned, its “mould” could still be saved through the imprint it left on the life of the saints. This is a beautiful expression.

Christian life is at the same time a work of obedience and of creativity. Good Christians must be obedient, but they must be creative. Obedient, because they listen to the Word of God; creative, because they have the Holy Spirit within who drives them to be so, to lead them forward. At the end of one of his discourses addressed in the form of parables, Jesus makes this comparison: “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure” — the heart — “what is new and what is old” (Mt. 13:52). The Holy Scriptures are an inexhaustible treasure. May the Lord grant us all to draw ever more from them, through prayer. Thank you.

The example of Venerable Card. Van Thuân

«The witness of the Blessed and Saints enlightens us, attracts us and also challenges us, because it is the “word of God” embodied in history and close to us»

(Pope Francis)

Francis Xavier Nguyễn Van Thuân was born April 17, 1928, in Huê, Vietnam, into a deeply Christian family. At the age of 12 he entered the minor seminary of the Huê Vicariate and, after years of study and formation in the major seminary, was ordained a priest on June 11, 1953. He was consecrated bishop on June 24, 1967. After eight years of pastoral leadership, on August 15, 1975, he was arrested because he was considered politically dangerous. He was accused of serving foreign governments that were undermining the success of the communist revolution in the country. Under military escort he was immediately deported to the village of Cay Vông, ten kilometers from his diocese. During his imprisonment he managed to have the faithful send him wine in a small bottle on which was attached a label that read, “Medicine against stomach ache,” and some hosts concealed in a flask to prevent dampness, celebrating Holy Mass in the palm of his hand, with three drops of wine and one drop of water. He lived in the presence of Jesus, whom he kept in his shirt pocket. This is how he describes these moments:

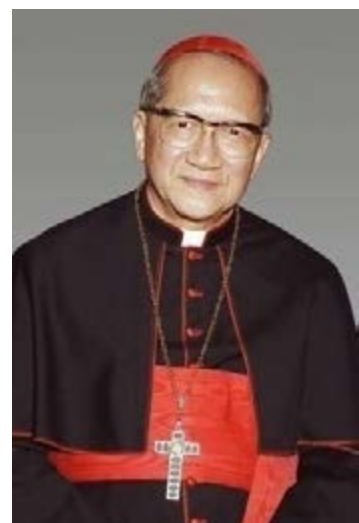
“I will never be able to express my great joy; every day with a few drops of wine and a drop of water in the palm of my hand, I celebrated Mass. This was my altar and this was my cathedral! Each time, I had the opportunity to stretch out my hands and nail myself to the cross with Jesus, to drink with him the most bitter chalice.... They were the most beautiful Masses of my life.... Thus, in prison I felt the very heart of Christ beating in my heart. I felt that my life was his life and his was mine.”

Deprived of a Holy Scripture text, by writing on small pieces of paper all the passages he remembered, he managed to compose a small personal Bible:

“In prison, I could not take the Bible with me; so I collected all the little pieces of paper I could find and made myself a tiny diary, in which I listed more than 300 sentences of the Gospel; this reconstructed and rediscovered Gospel was my daily vademecum, my precious treasure chest from which I drew strength and nourishment through lectio divina.”

The imprisonment lasted thirteen years, nine of which were in solitary confinement. Finally, he was freed on November 21, 1988, on the memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple. For Van Thuân, the connection was as simple as it was immediate: “Our Lady freed me!” During these years, Van Thuân clung to the Word of God and the Eucharist, trying to memorize passages from the Bible, and united himself spiritually with the Virgin Mary:

“When the physical and inward miseries in prison become too heavy and prevent me from praying, then I say the Hail Mary, I repeat the Hail Mary hundreds of times.”





ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ ΗΝΤΗΣΚΟ
ΤΟ ΦΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΤΙ ΑΛΛΕΞ
ΚΟΣΜΟΥ ΟΥΔΕ ΕΙ ΤΟ ΦΩΣ
ΚΟΛΟΥΘΩ ΜΕ ΤΗΣ ΕΩ
ΚΑΙ ΟΥΤΗ Η ΗΣ+
ΠΕΡΙΠΑΝ

LA·PARIT·SOLEM·ROSA FLOREM·FORMA·ΘΕΟΥ

Biblical Adoration

Biblical Adoration

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

This text is a proposal that should be later concretized and adapted to cultural contexts according to local traditions.

Having gathered the faithful and begun a song, the minister goes to the Tabernacle, takes the Blessed Sacrament and places it in the monstrance. Then, kneeling, he incenses the Blessed Sacrament.

C./ Lord, we contemplate Your real presence in this Blessed Sacrament and thank You for calling us to be before You. We gather together trusting in You and in Your Word. Prepare our minds and hearts to receive the graces You have prepared for us at this time. Make us aware at all times that we are before You and Your infinite love. Open our minds and wills to receive Your Word and proclaim it with our lives.

C./ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine

R./ Most Holy and Blessed Sacrament.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1:14)

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

C./ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine

R./ Most Holy and Blessed Sacrament.

“They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’” (Lk. 24:32)

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

C./ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine

R./ Most Holy and Blessed Sacrament.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:19-20)

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be ...

L./ Let us listen and embrace the Word of God, always alive and effective. Let it resonate within us and enlighten our lives.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

“Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord; whoever remains in me will bear much fruit.”

Alleluia.

Let us listen to the Word of the Lord from the Gospel according to John (15:1-5, 9-11)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

Guided Reflection:

L./ As part of the *Sunday of the Word of God*, we celebrate this time of adoration, which this year is inspired by the text, “*Remain in my word*” (Jn. 8:31). Let us reflect before Jesus in the Eucharist:

1. John begins his Gospel saying “the Word became flesh” (1,...). In Jesus, the invisible God became seen and heard. How many words and actions of Jesus could the apostles hear and see! Many of these have been recorded in the Gospels, where we can contemplate Jesus through his Word. Jesus continues to speak to us and continues to act in our lives.

(pause for silence between every point)

2. God wants to enter into a personal, intimate relationship with us. Jesus touched the hearts of so many of those who had an encounter with Him in the Gospel. Today, He wants to have this unique and exclusive relationship with each of us. Having a friendship relationship with Jesus means “remaining in Him.” But He also remains in us; it is mutual. It is the reciprocity intrinsic to friendship. One for the other and vice versa. As we read in the Song of Songs, “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (6:3). He remained present, alive and real in the Eucharist to give Himself totally to us, to remain with us “until the end of the world.” Now we must choose to “remain with Him,” not only in this moment of prayer, but all the days of our lives.
3. Without Jesus we can do nothing, like the branches without the vine. We must “remain in Jesus, to have the sap, the strength, to have justification, the gracious gift, to be fruitful. And He remains in us to give us the power to [bear] fruit (see Jn 5:15), to give us the strength to bear witness by which the Church grows” (Pope Francis, Homily in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, May 13, 2020).
4. His desire is to give us true joy. Only with Jesus will our life receive full joy. A pure joy that penetrates the whole being. Jesus is with us and will always remain with us; nothing will be able to separate us from Him, no one will therefore be able to rob us of our joy. Let us allow Him to speak His Word to us today. He always speaks with love and transforming

authority: “only say the word” as the Roman centurion said. Just one! He had a word for Levi at the table; one for Zacchaeus on the Sycamore; one for Peter, James and John by the sea; one for Mary outside the tomb... He has one for us, too. Let us allow Him speak to our hearts and let us remain and abide in His Word, for He alone has words of eternal life (cf. Jn. 6:69).

Personal Prayer

At this time, a printed biblical quotation from Jn. 15:5 (“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”) could be given to the faithful to encourage personal prayer. This moment of silence could be accompanied by fitting music.

Prayerful silence

Song

Community Prayers

L./ You who were contemplated by the shepherds and magi in Bethlehem...

R./ Let me discover you in my life, Lord. (cf. Mt. 2:11)

L./ You who showed Your glory on Tabor...

R./ Let me enjoy the joys of each day, Lord. (cf. Mt. 17:1f)

L./ You who called Your disciples to the lake shore...

R./ Let me also hear your call, Lord. (cf. Mt. 4:18-22)

L./ You who saw the resourcefulness of Zacchaeus...

R./ Let me offer you my efforts, Lord. (cf. Lk. 19:1f)

L./ You who by touching the deaf showed them your closeness...

R./ Let me receive your Word. (cf. Mk. 7:33)

L./ You who changed the whole perspective of Matthew's life...

R./ Fill my life with meaning, Lord. (cf. Mt. 9:9-13)

L./ You who, turning toward Lazarus, brought him back to life...

R./ Encourage my fervour and desire for holiness, Lord. (cf. Jn. 11:1f)

L./ You who, explaining the scriptures to your disciples along the way, turned their sadness into joy...

R./ Enkindle in us a love for your Word and the certainty of your presence. (cf. Lk. 24:13-35)

Song**Our Father**

C./ We thank you Lord because you are always near us, especially in the Eucharist and in your Word. At all times we want to turn to You, Word of Eternal Life, to welcome You with faith and simplicity, to share You with others with enthusiasm, to live Your Word in daily life and to proclaim You with courage. With the confidence of sons and daughters and in your own words we dare to say, *Our Father...*

Benediction

At the end of adoration, the priest or deacon goes to the altar; Tantum ergo or another appropriate hymn is sung. Meanwhile, kneeling, the minister incenses the Blessed Sacrament. Then he rises and says:

Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ,
 who in the wondrous sacrament of the Eucharist
 you have left us the memorial of your Passover,
 help us adore with living faith
 the holy mystery of your body and blood,
 that we may always feel in ourselves the benefits of redemption.
 You who live and reign forever and ever.

R./ Amen.

Having said the prayer, the priest or deacon puts on the white humeral veil, takes the monstrance or pyx and makes the sign of the cross over the people with the Blessed Sacrament, without saying anything.

Acclamations

If deemed fitting, according to local custom, the Divine Praises may be said after the Eucharistic blessing:

Blessed be God.
 Blessed be His Holy Name.
 Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man.
 Blessed be the name of Jesus.
 Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.
 Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.
 Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
 Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.
 Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.
 Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.
 Blessed be her glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
Blessed be Saint Joseph, her most chaste spouse.
Blessed be God in His angels and in His Saints.

Reposition

When the blessing is over, the priest or deacon who gave the blessing, or another priest or deacon, places the Blessed Sacrament back in the tabernacle and genuflects.





«Remain in my word»

(Jn. 8:31)

Outline for the Eucharistic Celebration

Some liturgical suggestions for the Celebration of the Mass are proposed, however, and at the discretion of the local bishop and the pastor, other gestures may be introduced that emphasize the importance of the Word of God in the celebrating community - in accordance with the current liturgical directions regarding the celebration of the Eucharist.

The ambo may be adorned and the lit Easter candle placed beside it. Next to the altar, or the ambo, or in another specially prepared place (e.g. a chapel), prepare a place visible to the whole assembly, elevated and adorned, where the sacred text can be placed. On another table, arrange the Bibles that will be given to the different representatives of the parish community.

It should be understood that, in the Mass, the table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ is prepared. The ambo is connected to the altar in that the Word announced from the ambo becomes "flesh" on the altar. One can, rightly, speak of "two tables": that of the Word and that of the Eucharist.

Mass begins as usual - if possible, with the solemn procession with the censer, the incense boat, the cross and the candles, and carrying the Book of the Gospels according to the liturgical customs of the Roman Church. The deacon (in his absence, the presbyter may perform the same sign) processionally carries the Book of the Gospels, holding it somewhat elevated, if possible also accompanied by two lit candles. Upon reaching the chancel, the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar in the centre.

Being placed on the altar gives the Book of the Gospels an exceptional honor. Since the altar is Christ himself, only the Eucharist and the Book of the Gospels enjoy the privilege of being placed on it. This placement is equivalent to an enthronement and to the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. This gesture, reserved for the sacred text, is meant to express the inner disposition of the faithful: the Word of God comes and takes the central place in the assembly.

After the initial greeting the penitential act is introduced with these or similar words:

C. Today the Church is celebrating the *Sunday of the Word of God*. It is a Sunday "devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God" (*Aperuit Illis*, 3). Let us open our minds and hearts to welcome the Word that is "a lamp for [our] feet, a light for [our] path" (cf. Ps. 118:105). God, through his Word, desires to reveal himself and dwell in our beings. So that we may welcome his presence during this celebration, let us acknowledge that we are sinners and confidently invoke God's mercy.

PENITENTIAL ACT

The penitential act follows, which could be the following:

C. Lord, you are the Word of God made flesh, *Kyrie eleison*

R. *Kyrie eleison*

- C. Christ, you restore sight to the blind by the power of your word, *Christe eleison*
 R. *Christe eleison*
 C. Lord, 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.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Since proclaiming the Word takes on the value of a salvific event in which salvation history is made present, great care should be taken in proclaiming the Word of God. It is not a mere reading of the text, but rather the proclamation of a presence; it is God who makes known his saving work. Thus, the reader is the primary mediator of God's Word, the one who must help the liturgical assembly to receive its message and to guard it in order to translate it into life.

The Lectionary is the liturgical book that collects all of the Word of God proclaimed in the Eucharistic celebrations. The Lectionary should, therefore, be dignified, decorated and beautiful, capable of evoking the sense of God speaking to His people. For this reason, substitute pastoral aids, such as "pamphlets," are not suitable for the proclamation of the Word of God; they should be intended for the faithful only for personal preparation and meditation on the readings. The liturgical book itself, should be like the epiphany of God's beauty in the midst of his people.

For the proclamation of the Gospel, the Book of the Gospels is taken from the altar to the ambo in procession, where it is incensed. During the "Gospel Acclamation" the incense-bearer goes to the seat, for the infusion of incense; he will then go, with the deacon or president, to the ambo for incensing and for the proclamation. It would be good to proclaim the initial greeting and proclamation, "A reading from the holy Gospel..." (and the final one, "The Gospel of the Lord") in song to emphasize the importance of what is being read. If the celebration is presided over by the bishop, at the end of the proclamation, the presbyter or deacon will bring the Book of the Gospels for the bishop to kiss. It is good that on this occasion the celebrant also imparts the blessing to the people.

"When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 29). When the presbyter or deacon takes up the Book of the Gospels from the altar, it is meant to signify that the following words being read are not their own, but those of Jesus, Lord of history and of the Church. The proclamation of the Gospel should be given the utmost attention; for this reason, it is good to precede it with incensation.

ENTHRONEMENT OF THE WORD OF GOD

At the end of the reading of the Gospel the minister kisses the sacred text and then takes it in

procession to the throne, where it is placed, opened and incensed. The throne can have candles, flowers or plant pots.

A commentator explains the gesture with these or similar words:

The book containing the Word of God is solemnly carried and placed on the throne. It is a symbolic gesture in which we not only raise the Holy Scripture in the midst of our praying community, but it also expresses our willingness to put it first in our lives. Thus, the Word of God becomes the beacon of our lives that illuminates our decisions and inspires our actions according to God's will.

During the great Ecumenical Councils, the tradition arose of laying the Book of the Gospels on a small throne, to accentuate the primacy of the Word of God. This also happened at the Second Vatican Council.



HOMILY

HANDING OUT THE BIBLE

At the end of the homily, the Bible (or one of its books such as, for example, one of the Gospels) may be handed out to all those present (or only to some). After a brief moment of meditative silence, the celebrant makes the introduction:

C. Beloved, the evangelist John reminds us, “[T]his is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (Jn. 17:3). We too, want to know God who has revealed himself through his Word. Therefore, we want to receive the Word, feeling the importance of its daily reading, in order to live more and more united with Christ Jesus. For this we now address our prayer to God.

After a brief moment of silent prayer, the celebrant, with arms extended, recites:

C. Father of light,
 We praise you and bless you
 For all the signs of your love.
 You have made these children of yours to be born again
 By water and the Holy Spirit
 In the womb of Mother Church
 And now you call them to listen and proclaim the Word that saves.
 May Jesus Christ who is your Word made man,
 Lead them to the knowledge of the mystery
 That is concealed from the learned and the intelligent
 And revealed to little ones.
 Grant that they may open their hearts
 To understand the meaning of the Holy Scriptures.
 Let them become living witnesses to the Gospel,
 Which they will read from these books.

May Mary, Mother of Wisdom, intercede for them,
 Who first received into her womb
 The Word made flesh.
 May your Holy Spirit grant each of us
 The grace to collaborate in simplicity and joy
 For the proclamation of your Word, to the glory of your name.
 Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

The celebrant goes to the table where the texts to be handed out are arranged, takes them and distributes them to the faithful. As he hands over the text, he says:

C. Receive the Holy Scriptures, read, proclaim and witness to God's Word with joy.

The Response:

R. Amen.

After the distribution of the texts is finished, the Mass proceeds as usual with the Creed and the Prayer of the Faithful.

Handing out the Bible to the faithful becomes an act of entrustment, in which the Word of God surrenders itself into the hands of man, who henceforth is responsible for receiving and passing it on. To pass it on, one must first receive it. Otherwise, one becomes a "futile preacher outwardly of God's word, who isn't also inwardly a listener." (Saint Augustine, Sermon 179,1)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

The following prayer of the faithful could be used, modifying it according to the needs of the community:

C. Dear brothers and sisters, gathered together to celebrate the mysteries of our redemption, we beseech Almighty God, that through his Word, our path to holiness may be renewed. Let us pray together and say, ***Make us, O Lord, heralds of your Word!***

1. For the Pope, bishops and priests, that they may love the Word of God more and more each day and joyfully share it in their deep meditation with the people entrusted to them. We call upon you.
2. For the readers and catechists who will receive their ministry today, that as they deepen their understanding of the Word of God each day, they may be configured with it and convey it by the witness of their lives. We call upon you.
3. For parents, so that enlightened and strengthened by God's Word, they may have the wisdom to guide their children, passing on the faith to them. We call upon you.
4. For the entire Christian community listening to God gathered around his Word, that it may grow in unity and bear authentic witness to God's love. We call upon you.
5. For the Church, called to be united in Christ, that in listening to Sacred Scripture it may discover the path to an authentic and stable unity. We call upon you.
6. For each of us that we may open our hearts to the Word of God and thus work together every day to build peace. We call upon you.

C. Gracious Father, hear these prayers which we offer to you in faith through your Son, the Word made flesh, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen

Holy Mass continues as usual.

SOLEMN BENEDICTION

The priest extends his hands and says:

C. May God, who has revealed his truth and charity in Christ,
make you apostles of the Gospel
and witnesses of his love in the world.

R. Amen.

C. May the Lord Jesus, who promised his Church
to be present until the end of the ages,
guide your steps and strengthen your words.

R. Amen.

C. May the Spirit of the Lord be upon you,
that as you walk the streets of the world
you may evangelize the poor and heal the contrite of heart.

R. Amen.

Bless all present saying:

C. And upon all you here present,
May the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son,
+ And the Holy Spirit come down on you and remain with you for ever.

R. Amen.



«Remain in my word»
(Jn. 8:31)



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