

## Homily Notes for Sunday January 27, 2019 - Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C

Readings: Neh 8: 2-4, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Luke 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21

“On the Importance of the Word of God”

**1. Summary: The scripture readings for today focus our attention on the importance and power of the Word of God.** Let us first reflect on the power and importance of speech and “words.” Then let us reflect on how great is the power of the Word of God and how important it should be in our lives as disciples. Can we be effective disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, if we do not know His Word?

**2. Clarification on “the Word”** Jesus himself is the “eternal Word” of God (the Logos – see John 1). But the Bible, along with “Sacred Tradition” is also rightly described as “the Word of God” (see 2 Thess 2:15, DV 7).

**3. Scripture lessons: Today’s first reading,** taken from Nehemiah shows how the reading and hearing of the ancient Scriptures of the Jewish people called them back to their traditional values and laid the foundation for their nation after the Exile. After having rebuilt the city walls and having started on rebuilding the Temple, Ezra the Scribe led the people in a ‘*Covenant renewal*’ ceremony. This was at a time of crisis. Torah became a living Word of power, grace and forgiveness to these exiles. It evoked from them a dramatic response. They came to realize the many ways in which they had failed to keep God’s commandments. Hence, with tears of repentance in their eyes and joy in their hearts, the people responded with a great “Amen!” Many challenges faced them, and they needed God’s values to gain unity.

**4. The Second Reading,** St Paul uses an historical image to call the community to unity. He goes back over 500 years to an image used by a famous Roman to bring the segments of the community together. In Corinth, they were fighting over various spiritual gifts. Paul reminds them that “*Together we are Christ’s body, but each of us is a different part of it.*” Hence, they should work together like the different parts of a body, offering their time, talents and treasures to build each other up. Each part of the body affects the whole, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it. If one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.” How would we apply this to our parish?

**5. Today’s Gospel** describes how, on a Sabbath, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus stood before the people in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, reading and interpreting what Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah and his mission. Jesus identifies himself as the One sent “to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberation to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed” – the work of the Messiah. This is a call to a ministry of “good works.” To the great amazement of his own townsmen, Jesus declared that Isaiah’s prophecy was being fulfilled before their very eyes. Note the power of these few words! After saying these, the people were ready to kill Jesus. But another miracle occurred and Jesus walked away through them.

**6. Let us remember how the identity of Jesus has been revealed multiple times.** The people then needed repeated examples of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The first one with Jesus as an adult was at his baptism, when the voice of God spoke saying, “You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” The second was at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee when he turned the water into wine. This is the third when he reveals through the reading of the Word of God that he is the Messiah, the chosen one prophesied by Isaiah. The people back at the time of Jesus needed repeated testimonies of who Jesus really was. Do not we need the same?

**7. Let us appreciate the importance of words, especially when it is the Word of God.**

1. Let us think about the importance and power of speech, for example dating and marriage. When a young couple is dating, and the young lady thinks she has a really good young man as a prospect, what is she hoping to hear? “I love you, would you marry me?” How many months and years have some young ladies waited to hear those words? And once they are said, everything changes. Plans are made for marriage preparation, for the marriage and dreams and visions arise of a life together with their children. On the other side of things, when a marriage fails, finally someone says, often in angry terms, “I don’t love you anymore. I want a divorce!” And once that has been said, everything changes again. Then we either decide to get to work to make things work right or things fall apart. Words have power. Words have meaning!

2. Now, in politics, the importance of speech and words. A good example of this is the power of speech to unify the people of Rome. In 494 BC Menenius Agrippa was chosen by the patriarchs of Rome during the secession of the plebs to persuade them to end their secession. Livy says that Menenius told the soldiers a fable about the parts of the human body and how each part has its own purpose in the greater function of the body. His speech restored unity to Rome and led to its greatness and power! This is the same analogy that St. Paul used to guide the members of the Church with different gifts to understand themselves all as a part of the body of Christ. Once we understand that we are all gifted by the Spirit with gifts to build up the whole body, we can understand how, although each one is different, all are needed to build up the Church community.

### **8. How powerful and necessary is the Word of God!** Here are several key passages.

1. Isaiah describes its power in Isa 55:10-11.

“For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.”

2. The Word of God is helpful in making judgments of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

3. The Word of God is necessary to faith and salvation (Rom 10:14ff).

“But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?”

4. The Word of God is necessary for the examination of conscience. Example of application: A favorite reading for funerals comes from the Book of Wisdom:

“But the souls of the just are in the hand of God... Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself” (Wis 3:1,5).

When we approach death and our funeral, how do we know if we are numbered amongst the just? How can we know if we will be found worthy of himself when he tries us? It must be on the basis of the Word of God, in this case, especially the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus.

**9. But how serious are we about knowing the Bible, the Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium** which teaches and interprets the Word of God? I think of an example when teaching at a Catholic school. Students were very resistant to memorizing facts in religion class. But at one point we were studying the content of popular music. The principal did not believe that the students knew their music that well, but while we were playing some of it, they were lip-synching every word. Could we be in danger of letting the secular values of our culture dominate our minds and our children?

### **10. The Church in the Second Vatican Council placed great emphasis on knowing the Word of God.**

**a. On the unity and balance of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist:** “the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body. “She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God’s Word and Christ’s Body” (CCC 103, DV 21).

**b. On Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church (CCC 131-133).** “Access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.” “Therefore, the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred theology.” The liturgical homily should hold pride of place among all forms of Christian instruction.

**c. On the importance of frequent reading of the divine Scriptures:** “The Church ‘forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. ‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ’”(CCC -133).

**d. On the interpretation of the Heritage of Faith.** “The Apostles entrusted the “Sacred deposit” of the faith, contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition (2 Thess 2:15) to the whole of the Church (CCC 84). “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone.” This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome” (CCC – 85, see 1 Tim 3:15 which identifies the Church as the pillar and foundation of truth). Remember that it was the Catholic Church that identified the very books of the Bible. Contrast this to the Protestant doctrine of “Bible alone.”

**11. I would like you to think when learning the truth of the Word of God made a change in your life. Please share it with me.** I am collecting such stories.

**12. Conclusion:** So far this year as we are entering on the journey of discipleship during Ordinary Time we have seen the identity of Jesus as the Son of God (week one, Baptism of Jesus) and we have seen the power of Jesus to perform miracles (week two, and affirmed the reality of the supernatural world) in the miracle of changing water into wine at the Marriage in Cana of Galilee. This week we are reflecting on the importance and power of this Jesus Christ, who is Himself the very Word of God, to guide us in our lives and lead us to eternal salvation. Today I invite us to make a new commitment to knowing and applying the Word of God. What are we willing to do to know and apply the Word of God in our lives? As you look around you and see what is happening to people and to families, what could be the consequences of being ignorant of or of ignoring the Word of God?

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