

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time “A Celebration of the Word of God”

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Pope Francis recently declared that this Sunday should be dedicated to the celebration of the Word of God and the prominence Sacred Scripture enjoys as a source of revelation to us as a People of God. You see, we would know nothing about God unless God spoke to us. The activity of God speaking to us is what we mean by Divine Revelation. In fact, the Second Vatican Council Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, speaks of Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition as flowing from the same font that is Divine Revelation. The insight here is that, yes the Word of God is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, that inspiration does not happen in a vacuum. That inspiration happens through a living, breathing community that existed at the time the texts were written and lived by each generation to the present day. Sacred Scripture should therefore be understood as a living Word not a dead one. When we read Sacred Scripture we encounter the living God who has entered into a relationship with his Chosen People, not just myself as an individual. I am not an island in the midst of humanity. The relationship God is seeking through Sacred Scripture is with his Chosen People in which we are adopted into through the waters of Baptism. This is why the lived tradition and Sacred Scripture are understood as flowing from the same font that is Divine Revelation.

And it is true that our experience of belonging to God’s Chosen People can sometimes mirror what is going on in our second reading from First Corinthians. St. Paul is frustrated that the church of Corinth is divided into many factions. He writes, “For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe’s people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” It is a beautiful passage wherein St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Gospel has called them to be one with Jesus. For St. Paul, this is accomplished by being a Eucharistic people as we see later in his letter in chapter 11. What does a Eucharistic people look like? In chapter 12, St. Paul argues that this looks like being one body of Christ. What does being one body of Christ look like? In chapter 13, St. Paul argues that the Body of Christ looks like a people of faith, hope and love. And, the greatest of these is love. St. Paul is saying all of this in his letter to the Corinthians because he is not seeing a lot of love there. This is why I see the invitation to celebrate the Word of God throughout the world this Sunday as a reminder of why Divine Revelation was given to us in the first place. Everything about the Word of God points us to Jesus and a lived, that is to say, Sacramental relationship with him as one body of Christ who are united by faith, hope and love.

My friends, if you travel the world you will be amazed at how many beautiful and diverse ways the Catholic faith can be expressed. As you all know, I joined a delegation of parishioners to Kenya last week to check in on the orphanage we support and to see the church we financed for them at Nyumbani Village. It was an amazing and Spirit filled pilgrimage. I think of our time over there as a pilgrimage because it offered us the opportunity to grow in our relationship with God by being enriched by the beautiful people we support in Africa. I will have much to share with you as time goes on, however, for today I want to speak briefly on how their reverence for the Word of God touched our hearts. You see, in a Catholic Mass in Kenya, the Liturgy of the

Word is an event marked by singing and dancing. I think this moved me the most because many of the kids at the orphanage we support are receiving treatment for HIV because they were born with it. Many of them have experienced trauma no child should ever experience on this planet and have come to this orphanage from backgrounds marked by extreme poverty. How would you and I respond if this was our experience of life? This is something worth contemplating. What would be our response to God if we experienced that kind of suffering in life? The response of these children in Africa to all the suffering in this world is to celebrate the Word of God every time they gather by singing and dancing. If you forget everything else I say this Sunday, please remember that observation. These children offer us a wonderful witness that is worthy of puzzling over.

Of course, in an African liturgy, nothing happens quickly let me tell you. The mass we participated in at the village was three hours long. The homily alone was about a half hour or so. In Africa, my understanding is that this would be considered a quick homily. I couldn't help but think to myself, if I were to preach that long here in Western Washington, how many people would start writing letters to the Archbishop? In Africa, I discovered that if you preach less than a half hour the people there feel cheated, like the priest didn't prepare adequately. It is a very different world there, however, it was enriching to experience their expression of the Liturgy of the Word.

Yes, if you travel the world, you will see many different beautiful expressions of the Catholic faith and yet we are all one body of Christ. We are one because we are a Eucharistic people who belong to Jesus. We are called to be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. And this journey begins with a reverence for Sacred Scripture. No matter which Catholic Church you enter on this planet, the readings for that Sunday are the same wherever you go. I find that beautiful because, even though there are many expressions of being Catholic we are united in large part by the Liturgy of the Word. It is the Word of God that invites us into a relationship with him because we would know nothing about God if he didn't speak to us. The Word of God is our Father in heaven offering a relationship to us through his Son Jesus Christ.

Because God has spoken to us through Sacred Scripture, following our first reading from Isaiah and our Gospel from St. Matthew today, the people in darkness have indeed seen a great light. What does this mean for us today? A good question for us this week could be: how well do we incorporate the Word of God into our daily lives? As you know, this can be accomplished in a number of ways. Personally, I like to reflect each morning on the readings for the day and reflect on what they mean for me personally, for my family, my community and for the world in which we live. What are the ways that we can be more intentional about incorporating the Word of God into our daily lives? I think this is an important question to consider because we are not isolated from the communities in the Bible from which these texts come from. We are their descendants, their story is our story, and the light God entrusted to them has been entrusted to us no matter where or what culture we find ourselves in. It is good to be reminded that, when we celebrate the Good News entrusted to us in Sacred Scripture with the world around us, the people who walk in darkness will indeed have the opportunity to be embraced by the light. This is accomplished, no matter where we find ourselves, by celebrating the Word of God as God's Chosen People through our thoughts, words, and deeds.