

## Ordinary Time Week 3 (Sunday of the Word of God) – Cycle A

Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Ps 26; Cor 1:10-13.17; Matt 4:12-23

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Today is Sunday of the Word of God. We are asked to spend some time pondering Sacred Scripture. This may seem a little odd, given that we hear Scripture every Sunday at the Mass and every time during the week when we attend Mass then; every time a priest or deacon gives a homily; and that all of our prayers during the day are either derived either directly or indirectly, from scripture: from the psalms, to the Lord's prayer and the Hail Mary.

Maybe that is the point. We see and hear Holy Scripture so much that we cease to recognise it as a whole. We are so busy examining them week by week, weighing up words, trying to understand the intention of the writer, and trying to see its relevance for our daily lives that we cease to rejoice in Scripture for its own sake.

In the Vatican II document 'Dei Verbum' – or rather less enticingly 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation' - the following is written:

*The sacred scriptures of both Testaments, are like a mirror, in which the church, during its pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom it receives everything, until such a time as it is brought to see him face to face as he really is.*<sup>1</sup>

The sacred Scriptures 'are like a mirror, in which the church... contemplates God.' The church is not contemplating its own image in this scriptural reflection, it is contemplating God's reflection. If scripture is God's reflection, then it is natural to say that it is God's likeness, an image of who God really is. But to see this likeness you need to the whole picture. If you always pick and choose what you listen to you will fail to fully understand the story, or as I prefer to think of it, God's song to us.

For example, if you listen to the first story of the Creation in the book of Genesis but not the second story, you may not realise that they are not trying to give you scientific facts about creation, but facts about why you were created. If you only hear Psalm 150 you may think that God only wants our praise and the happy sound of musical instruments and you never hear the agony of Psalm 22, uttered by Jesus on the cross in Matthew's Gospel '*my God, my God, why have you abandoned me*'<sup>2</sup>, nor understand that those words begin a song of hope. And, if you do not spend time to read both the beginning and end of John's Gospel you will not see that the Son of God is not only the means of our redemption, but the means of our original creation.<sup>3</sup>

Scripture is there for four purposes: 1) to listen to, 2) to contemplate, 3) to speak, and 4) to act on.

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<sup>1</sup> Dei Verbum, Chapter II: 7

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 27 verse 36,

<sup>3</sup> John 1:2 and 20:30

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- 1) **To listen to scripture.** We need quiet. We are not reading or hearing an audio book on self-improvement or about a spare member of royalty, or about what God has spoken. We are hearing God speak now. What he has said is for eternity.
- 2) **To contemplate Holy Scripture.** We need to understand the historical period in which it was said, because that helps us understand why it was said in the way or images that it was spoken. This does not mean it was for only that time, it means we need to understand the time so we understand the image. We need also to absorb it under our skin so that it becomes a part of us, like Mary pondering her Son.
- 3) **To speak** – we need to say what we have heard. If there is no voice then who will hear it? Are you going to wait for God to speak to them? You are God's voice, speaking his Word. You have plenty of material, 1,800 plus years worth. But this needs to be balanced with a deep understanding of the church's teaching so we are not inventing our own Holy Spirit, but listening to the one breathed into the Church at Pentecost.
- 4) **We need to act** – to give to the poor, to stop swearing, to bring our children up in the faith as if it were a matter of life or death, not convenience or choice. To stand opposite an abortion centre and pray even if it costs. To say sorry when it is humiliating. To forgive when it is so much easier not to. To dance before the Ark of the

Covenant and to pick up your cross. To work for peace. As you have heard, so you are to live.

Holy Scripture is not merely heard: it is to be held in reverence. It is for this reason that it is not supposed to be read at Mass off a reading stand which is there for the convenience of holding a book. It is to be read off of an ambo or lectern made of worthy material which is rooted to the ground, and which is worthy of its purpose: to show us God's reflection.

Some final words from Dei Verbum

*"The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dei Verbum, 21