

Homily - Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (Word of God Sunday)

“The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

For the last four years, this Third Sunday in Ordinary Time has been marked by the Church as the ‘Sunday of the Word of God’ - a special day to reflect on the central role of Sacred Scripture in the Church for handing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As many of you have heard me say in the past, we are living through a sort of modern renaissance within the Catholic Church in the new availability and diversity of options for study and reflection on Scripture.

In his letter instituting this special day, the Holy Father mentions that while the homily itself is the primary time in which many of us reflect on the application of Scripture to our daily lives, every one of us really ought to be integrating the Bible into our daily routines of prayer.

As he writes, “The Bible cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few. It belongs above all to those called to hear its message and to recognize themselves in its words... The Bible is the book of the Lord’s people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity.”

In other words, at the risk of repeating myself - we need to spend time with the Word of God.

It has the power to transform lives and renew vocations of all kinds.

But where do we begin?

If there is one piece of advice I can give, it's not to overthink it.

Just start. Saint Augustine, who had spent so many years of his life in sin and debauchery, heard the Lord speaking to him in his heart at a pivotal moment in his journey of conversion.

The voice spoke to him, saying, *tolle et lege, tolle et lege* - "take and read, take and read."

Hearing those words, Augustine picked up the Scriptures and found himself drawn to a passage of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans:

"Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,* not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."

Those words were enough to strike Saint Augustine to the heart and set him on the path of conversion, and toward the heights of sanctity.

Hundreds of years later, a similar event would play out in the medieval Italian town of Assisi, where a young Francesco di Pietro di Bernardone, later to be known as Francis of Assisi, had just found his first follower, Bernard of Quintavalle.

Bernard, inspired by the holiness of St. Francis, wanted to follow his example and offer his life and possessions to the service of God.

And so the two of them opened the Word of God and prayed for the Lord's guidance.

There in the Scriptures, they found the words of the Gospel of Matthew:

“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven”

Then, as the story goes, he opened the book again and found a new passage, Matthew 16:24: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

Then, a third time, they found the Lord’s command in the Gospel of Mark that his apostles go out, “taking nothing for their journey”.

As Francis closed the book and said to Bernard: “This is our life and rule, and—not only ours—but all those who wish to follow us. Let us go forth then, and observe all the things that we have heard.”

Those were the humble beginnings of the Franciscan order, now among the greatest in the history of the Church.

So we should ask, why would the Lord not move in such powerful ways today, through his same living and active words and Scriptures?

He does, for those who are willing to pray and listen, take and read.

Again, there are many techniques and traditions for how best to pray with the Sacred Scriptures.

In fact, on our website you can read my homily from last year’s 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, which gives a step-by-step method of *lectio divina*, a meditative form of prayer based on Scripture that can be used with the daily readings or any other passage of the Bible.

But once again, don't overthink it.

Find your Bible. Buy one you'll use if you don't have one.

This weekend, as we venerate the Scriptures, we will entrust this same treasure to our candidates and catechumens preparing to enter the Catholic Church this Easter, because the Church knows how important it is that they be immersed in God's living Word.

Let's do the same.

Seek Our Lord's guidance and consolation as we respond to his command, to repent and believe in his Gospel, giving to us in these sacred texts.

Now, as we prepare to receive his Body and Blood, let us give thanks for this great gift, and pray that through the power of his Word, we will be given the grace to encounter him there in a new way, as he prepares us to know him face to face eternity.