

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Theme: We are all called to Proclaim and live the Word of God by our Life.

On Sept 30, 2019, on the feast day of St. Jerome, a renowned great Scripture scholar, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time every year should be celebrated as “The Sunday of the Word of God.” As you will notice this year, it falls on Sunday January 26, 2025.

Our Holy Father chose the theme: “I HOPE IN YOUR WORD” (PS. 119:74) for this Word of God Sunday. The Pope asked us to please devote this Third Sunday to the celebration, study, and dissemination of the Word of God. Pope Francis invites all his faithful Catholics to deepen their appreciation, love, and faithful witness to God and his Word.

As Catholic Christians, we are called to proclaim and live the Word of God by our life. St. Jerome highlights this beautifully in these words: “Ignorance of the Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” We can’t know Christ and do his mission he has called to, if we do not read, proclaim, and live the Word of God in our daily life. The Word of God has and still is the only book that is ever new and useful/helpful for all generations. Someone put it in this best remark: “The bestseller par excellence which remains unsurpassed by any book is the Bible.”

The Dicastery of Evangelization (Vatican) has suggested very simple but meaningful ways of loving the Word of God and living it in our daily life. Here are some of the ways they suggested: carry the Word of God with you, physically or on your phone; enthrone the Bible in the Church and in your homes; study and pray with the Bible, join a Bible study group, pray the Liturgy of the Hours, pray and meditate on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary.

In both the first and the Gospel readings we just heard, the Word of God was not just read and proclaimed but also explained, and the congregation assented to it with Amen!

The first reading deals with the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon after spending a half-century in Jerusalem. Those who came back to rebuild the city and restore Jewish religion met with some frustrations. There were two prominent Jews namely Ezra, a priest scribe, and Nehemiah, the cupbearer of the Persian King, who remained in Babylon. When they heard of the plight of their people who returned to Jerusalem, they asked the Persian King if he would allow them to go to Jerusalem to help their people to rebuild the city and restore Jewish religion. The King granted them their request. Nehemiah became a great governor, and Ezra also continued with his priestly duties in Jerusalem. In today’s reading, we hear that after they rebuilt the city and the temple, Ezra asked his people to rededicate their whole life to God. He proclaimed and explained the Torah, the Word of God, to his people, and the entire people gathered there that day agreed with him by their assent. Amen.

In the Gospel reading we just heard, Jesus also proclaimed and explained the Word of God to his people in the Synagogue. Jesus, as the Word of God that came to dwell among us, also reminds us that the Word of God must be an important part of our daily life. If you recall his temptation by Satan in the desert after his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus reminded Satan, and I believe all of us, that “ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT COMES FORTH FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD”- Matthew 4:4.

In this passage of St. Luke, Jesus also announced his mission statement that God’s promises are fulfilled in him especially for the poor and oppressed in the world.

For us to proclaim/explain and live the Word of God faithfully, it is true that we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit, but we must also realize that no one can do it alone. We need one another. This explains well what St. Paul reminds the Christian community in Corinth that we heard in the second reading.

Just a brief background of this passage: as the Christian community in Corinth was accomplishing great things, unfortunately there was misunderstanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God bestowed upon them. Those who spoke in tongues started to look down on those who did not have the gift of speaking in tongues. St. Paul wrote this passage to address this conflict that almost destroyed this Christian community in Corinth. He reminded them that each one of them is blessed with different gifts which are meant to build unity to help the church grow and continue to carry on the mission Jesus Christ called them to do through his apostle Paul.

St. Paul underscores the importance of diversity in unity. We must always remember that uniformity does not mean unity. Through baptism, we become one with our divine Master, Jesus Christ, the head of his Church. As St. Paul put it, the human body is one though made up of many parts, so is the Church of Christ, which is composed of different members with different blessed gifts, talents meant to build Christ's kingdom here on earth.

Like St. Paul's Christian community of Corinth, let us also remember that each and every one of us is blessed with a gift/talent that is meant to build our Parish community so that we will continue to be a beacon of hope and love for our community here in Upshur County.

As we celebrate the Word of God Sunday, let us please remember that "THE ONLY BOOK SOME PEOPLE WILL EVER READ ABOUT THE GOSPEL IS THE BOOK OF OUR LIVES."

This week also, we celebrate National Catholic Schools Week. We thank God for our teachers, faculty, families, and all those who support and promote Catholic education.

Let me please conclude my homily with the advice and prayer of Pope Francis: "May the Sunday of the Word of God help his people to grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the Sacred Scripture, for as the Sacred author taught of old, "This Word is very near to you: it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance (Dt 30:14).