



The Year of the Word Reflection 3

"Then he opened
their minds to
understand the
Scriptures."
Luke 24: 4-5

Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, *Motu proprio "Aperuit illis"*, published on 30th September 2019, established that "the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time was to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the Word of God".

The newly established "Sunday of the Word of God" is an invitation to Catholics across the world to deepen their appreciation, love and faithful witness to God and His Word. For at the moment, although the Bible is the most widely distributed book, it is also perhaps the one most covered in dust because it is not held in our hands every day. So, in this inaugural year (2020) on the 26th January all the Faithful are invited to bring their Bibles to Mass to be blessed. The Pope hopes that this will help the Church "experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of His word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world."

The Pope "invites us to hold the word of God in our hands every day as much as possible so that it becomes our prayer" and a greater part of our lived experience.

But in his letter, Pope Francis wrote, "A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a yearlong event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord, who continues to speak His Word and to break bread in the community of believers." So, this is the message that the Bishops of England and Wales are championing with their initiative of "The God who Speaks."

The Pope stated, "We need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness. Sacred Scripture and the sacraments are inseparable, Jesus speaks to everyone with His Word in sacred Scripture, and if people hear His voice and open the doors of their minds and hearts, then He will enter their lives and remain ever with them. 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 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 toward unity - coming to understand God's love and becoming inspired to share it with others. It is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth without the Lord who opens people's minds to His Word, yet without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and of His Church in this world would remain incomprehensible."

Further, as the third Sunday in Ordinary Time falls during that part of the year when the Church is encouraged to strengthen its bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity, it also has a great ecumenical value for our World of today.

Prayer of Blessing

Everlasting God,
when he read in the synagogue at Nazareth,
your Son proclaimed the good news of salvation
for which he would give up his life.
Bless all who will read from these sacred texts.
As they read, listen and reflect on your words of life,
strengthen their faith
so that what they read in hope,
they may live in love and charity.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

What is the Bible?

The book that has probably had the biggest influence on the History of the World is almost certainly the Christian Bible. It has touched individuals and societies in so many different ways. It has been a source of fascination even for those without faith. But what exactly is the Bible?

Well, it looks like a book. You can pick it up, you can hold it in your hands. It's got a title page and a table of contents. A big section at the front, usually called the Old Testament that tells about the time before Jesus was born; and a shorter section at the back, usually called the New Testament that tells about the life of Jesus, what happened after His death and Heaven. So it's not a single book, it's an astonishing collection of different writings from the Jewish and Christian traditions. It's written by different people, in different places, over many centuries. In effect it's a whole library, rather than an individual book. It brings together history, poetry, song, prayer; legal documents, moral codes, religious instruction. But despite all this diversity, there is a common theme. It tells the story of God's plan for humankind, as it unfolds from the creation of the world to the end of time. It speaks about God's love for all people; His special love for the Jewish people; the coming of the Messiah or Saviour, Jesus Christ; His death and resurrection; the gift of the Holy Spirit; and the beginnings of the Christian Church. It finishes with an extraordinary vision of Heaven.

The most important books in the Bible for Christians are the four Gospels. Written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, telling the story of Jesus from different perspectives. They are trustworthy, historical documents that connect us with His life and His teaching. Christians believe that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean it dropped down from heaven, fully formed; or that God dictated it by speaking into the ears of the authors. No. They were real authors, and the history of the Bible is incredibly complex. But God was guiding them and guiding this history, and giving us the truth we needed for our salvation.

So, the Bible is absolutely central to the Christian life and to the Church. Christians believe that God speaks to us through the words and events of the Bible. These are not just dead words sitting on a page. They come alive and we are drawn into the reality of these events; it is like those amazing pop up books you can buy, when you turn the page and an incredible scene unfolds itself and literally pops up in front of you that makes you feel like you can step inside. There is a spiritual power in the God's Word - with a capital "W". His Word created the universe. His Word walked among us in Jesus Christ. And His Word has the power to change our lives today. This is why it's said that Christianity is a religion of the Word, rather than a religion of the Book. We read this book, but we hear the voice of Christ. Jesus said that we can make our home in His Word. And a Christian author said: In the Gospels you will find the life of Jesus, but you will find your own life there too. But to do that we have to read the Bible!

Books, films, music, all of these are things that form and influence you over the years. It's more than just entertainment. It's the culture in which you live. You learn a whole way of seeing the world. It shapes your heart and mind. It effects how you interact with others and with the World in general. It effects your thoughts, words and actions. Reading the Bible can allow change for the good to happen in our World but it is up to us to take this opportunity that the Pope and Church are reminding us of this year so that this can happen.

Are you ready?

Will you listen to the call?

What changes can you bring about for the good of all?



Readings for Reflection from the Gospel of St Matthew

Jesus Begins his Ministry in Galilee 4:12-17
Jesus Calls his first Disciples 4:18-22
Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People 4:23-25
The Beatitudes 5:1-12
Salt and Light 5:13-16
The Law and the Prophets 5:16-20

We pray

For all who read the word of God,
may they be inspired to love God with
all their heart and soul.

For all who pray with the word of God,
may their lives be living witness to the
way of the Lord.

Amen