

Homily for January 23, 2022 – 3rd Sunday Ord. Time, Yr. C

There are many concerns in our minds and hearts at this time. Certainly, this weekend in the United States we remember that January 22nd [twenty-second] is a day we pray for full legal rights and respect for children in the womb. And we recommit ourselves to working with individuals and families - and also within our society - to help life, family, marriage, and parenthood thrive. Especially among those who need help.

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This weekend also has a focus for the Church throughout the world. In September two-thousand-nineteen, Pope Francis declared that – in his words, “the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study, and dissemination of the word of God. This Sunday of the Word of God will thus be a fitting part of that time of year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity...”

The phrase “The Word of God” has deep implications in our faith. First, we understand That Christ is God the Son – who is the Word of the Father, and is among us as “The Word Made Flesh.” It is through the Word that God creates all things. When we use the phrase “Word of God,” we always recall the divine life of our Triune God.

Second, from the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation by the Second Vatican Council, the Word of God is imaged as the divine wellspring from which all Revelation comes. And the Church’s responsibility is to hand down this water of revelation in its fulness. The Church does that through two streams that are equally important, and in fact are interconnected. They are called Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Third, it is particularly about Sacred Scripture that we speak today about Word of God.

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Catholics have a bad reputation regarding knowing their bible. It is a complicated issue to figure out whether we deserve this reputation or not. My dad had a bible he read growing up. I was given New Testaments when I was in

grade school. A bible was required for Catholic High School religion classes. And that bible went with me to college. Even before the nineteen-sixties, when we started having much more reading in Church from the Old Testament, my parents and their parents before them knew about the Ten Commandments, Jonah, Noah, Samson, Adam and Eve. Obviously, Catholics learned and read about these events as part of our faith. For the past several decades Catholic parishes have presented many bible studies.

When I was a younger priest, I had ministers of other denominations mention that they also had significant percentages their congregations that had bibles on their coffee tables which were only touched once a week when they were dusted off.

And yet, for all that, it is good to spend more time with our bibles. In my previous assignment, a staff member once spent several Sundays asking survey questions of parishioners coming into Mass. The reason was that, as part of an upcoming parish party, she was preparing a religious version of the game show Family Feud. Let us just say that the “Survey Says” quotes showed some interesting responses to basic questions like the names of the four Gospels. Or even how many gospels there are. (Four)

Again, this was a dozen years ago, not fifty or a hundred or more. So, every generation, every new year of people, needs to make a decision on knowing these classics, these basic documents that have formed us as a people, and promise to form each of us new daily.

It is always good to be comfortable with the bible, and know our way around it. And treasure it. Not by putting it in a bank vault, but knowing it, being familiar with it.

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In light of this Sunday of the Word of God, this *Year C*, this Third year in our three-year cycle of Sunday readings, is perhaps the best set of readings to speak of Scripture.

Our First Reading today is from the Book of Nehemiah. This involves the people who returned from the Babylonian Exile in the Five Hundred’s, BC. They came to a ruined city of Jerusalem, and started to rebuild. This was not just of stone

structures, but of their identity as the people of God. And so, when everything is prepared, Ezra reads from the book of the law for six hours that day.

The Word of God has that effect on us. We know who we are when we come before God who knows us better than we know ourselves. God ministers to us. And give us life.

Our Responsorial today has us repeating: “Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.” We understand that spirit is life-giving. We know what it means to be spiritually poor, to feel lifeless, to have no energy. The Word of God is a source of well-being. It is one of the ways God inspires us – fills us with Spirit.

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And finally, we have our Gospel today. This year, most of our Sunday readings work our way through Luke. We have started, and jumped around a bit, during Advent and Christmas. Today we start with the first words from Luke, and then jump to Chapter four.

In the first words, we hear what Luke’s intention is. It is the intent of all the Gospel writers. Having checked with reliable sources, he wishes to give us an accurate and trustworthy account of important events about Jesus Christ.

For those of us who have not read Luke in a while, this would be a good time to read the whole book, or listen to it read. There are twenty-four chapters. If one goes through only one chapter a day, it can be read in three-and-a-half weeks. Luke also wrote a second volume. It is The Acts of the Apostles, which is located in our bibles right after the four gospels. It has twenty-eight chapters, and so could be read in four weeks if one went through it one-chapter-a-day.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke also starts by addressing the person named Theohpilus – whom he also mentions here at the beginning of the gospel. We do not know who he is, though the name was common in Greek at that time. Like so many names, his has a meaning. It literally means, “God’s friend.” We, too, can be encouraged as God’s friends to read this book.

The reading then proceeds with Luke Chapter four. Why this jump? It makes sense if we recall what we have been celebrating. The first couple chapters of Luke are dedicated to Jesus’ birth and childhood, which we read about in the last several weeks. Our Lord is then baptized by John, which we celebrated two

weeks ago. Then he goes into the desert for forty days, and is tempted by the devil. We will read about this in Lent. It is after the Temptations that His ministry begins, and it is here that we pick up today's reading.

Fresh from the anointing of the Spirit in Baptism and the testing in the desert, Jesus comes in the power of the Spirit to Nazareth. And like our First reading, the Scriptures are read.

The Word Made Flesh reads from the Word of God and interprets. And this begins His ministry.

My brothers and Sisters, may we remember Our Baptism. May we ponder these Scripture passages this week. May we spend all our days - but perhaps most especially in these days immediately following this special Sunday - letting Scripture change us and affirm our faith. Our faith which is revealed by The Word of God.