

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This Sunday has been designated by the Church as **The Sunday of the Word of God**. It is a day for us to experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of his word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches.

Today's Readings

Nehemiah 8:2-6. 8-10

After their return to their homeland from exile, the people of Israel are moved to tears by the public reading of God's word.

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

St Paul teaches that we together are Christ's body, made up of many different parts.

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

The beginning of Luke's Gospel: Jesus proclaims God's word and sets out his mission statement.



"Today this text is being fulfilled while you're listening to it !" The first

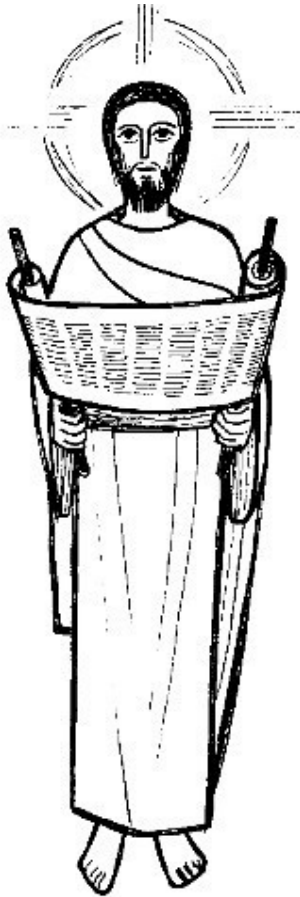
reading, from the book of Nehemiah, is one of the earlier witnesses to the belief in biblical inspiration. When Ezra, the scribe, read from the book of the law

"which the Lord had given to Israel," the people wept in the sheer emotion of hearing God's Word.

There's another major Old Testament example of that in the book of Kings. What happened was that "The book of the law" was discovered in the temple when renovation work was going on. It was after a long period of apostasy. The reaction on hearing the book read is similar to that in the Nehemiah reading.

But they don't only recognise **the special character** of the Word of God; equally important is **the effect** that it produces. In both cases a reform of the people's lives begins. This is the divine purpose of inspiration. This is why God wanted to associate himself in a special way with human words.

By the time of Jesus, belief in **the sacred character** of the Hebrew Bible was common among the Jews. They referred to it simply as "The Scriptures," the Writings (par excellence). The synagogue service involved an elaborate system of readings from the Law and the Prophets.



This brings us to the Gospel reading from this year's Gospel writer: Luke. In the Synagogue, a prominent member of the community, or someone known to be well-versed in the Scriptures, would choose a reading and comment on it. The Gospel today it is Jesus, who would have been recognised as a native of Nazareth; he was given the book of Isaiah for a reading.

Jesus seems to have had a particular text in mind that he wanted to read. We're told that "he unrolled the scroll and searched for the passage where it was written. . . ." The passage he found is an excellent summary of who Jesus was and what his messianic work was: He is "the anointed" of the Spirit. Anyone who knew the Old Testament would have known that kings, priests, prophets, and the "suffering servant" were all spoken of as being **anointed**. While Jesus shared all of these offices in some way, the readers of Luke's Gospel would have remembered **the anointing** by the Spirit at Jesus' baptism, in the preceding chapter. There he is also identified as **God's beloved Son**.

Also, the works that Jesus would do in his earthly life and in his death and resurrection are **precisely** those mentioned in the text from Isaiah that Jesus reads:

Good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
sight to the blind,
liberty to the oppressed

—these are the signs of the messianic age, of the Jubilee year in all its fullness.



The Gospel reading concludes with Jesus rolling up the scroll, handing it back to the assistant and sitting down.

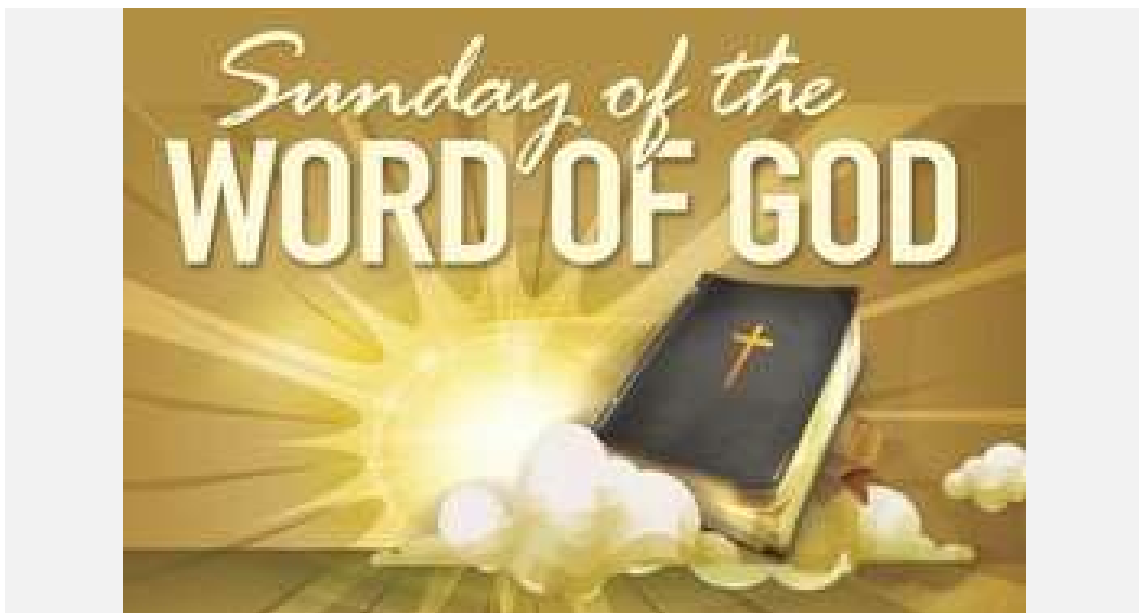
Perhaps the Church deliberately ended the reading there: we don't get Luke's account of the people's reaction. Perhaps we're meant to savour this bold statement of Jesus so that we can hear the fullness of the Word and express our own reaction, not influenced by the reactions of other people.

What is our reaction?

Rejection and continuing in the same old rut?

Or acceptance and change?

It must be one or the other; that's the very nature of **the Word**.




THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Sunday of the Word of God (started by Pope Francis) is held every year on the third Sunday of Ordinary Time. This us, priests and people alike, of the importance and value of Sacred Scripture for the Christian life, as well as the relationship between the word of God and the liturgy:

“As Christians, we are one people, making our pilgrim way through history, sustained by the Lord, present in our midst, who speaks to us and nourishes us. A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a year-long 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. For this reason, we need to develop a closer relationship with Sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, inflicted as we are by so many forms of blindness”.

GOSPEL WORDSEARCH

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