



The Holy See

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St. Peter's Basilica

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, 22 January 2023

[Multimedia]

Jesus leaves the quiet and hidden life of Nazareth and moves to Capernaum, a port city located along the Sea of Galilee, at the crossroads of different peoples and cultures. The urgency that impels him is the proclamation of the Word of God, which must be brought to everyone. Indeed, we see in the Gospel that the Lord invites all to conversion and calls the first disciples so that they may also spread the light of the Word to others (cf. *Mt 4:12-23*). Let us appreciate this dynamism, which will help us live out the Sunday of the Word of God: *the Word is for everyone, the Word calls everyone to conversion, the Word makes us heralds.*

The Word of God is for everyone. The Gospel presents us with Jesus always on the move, on his way to others. On no occasion in his public life does he give us the idea that he is a stationary teacher, a professor seated on a chair; on the contrary, we see him as an itinerant, we see him as a pilgrim, travelling through towns and villages, encountering faces and their stories. His feet are those of the messenger announcing the good news of God's love (cf. *Is 52:7-8*). In Galilee of the Gentiles, on the sea route, beyond the Jordan, where Jesus preaches, there was – the text notes – a people plunged into darkness: foreigners, pagans, women and men from various regions and cultures (cf. *Mt 4:15-16*). Now they too can see the light. And so Jesus “enlarges the boundaries”: the Word of God, which heals and raises up, is not only destined for the righteous of Israel, but for all; he wants to reach those far away, he wants to heal the sick, he wants to save sinners, he wants to gather the lost sheep and lift up those whose hearts are weary and oppressed. In short,

Jesus 'reaches out' to tell us that God's mercy is for everyone. Let us not forget this: God's mercy is for everyone, for each one of us. Each person can say, "God's mercy is for me".

This aspect is fundamental also for us. It reminds us that the Word is a gift addressed to everyone; therefore we can never restrict its field of action, for beyond all our calculations, it springs forth in a spontaneous, unforeseen and unpredictable way (cf. *Mk 4:26-28*), in the ways and times that the Holy Spirit knows. Moreover, if salvation is destined for all, even the most distant and lost, then the proclamation of the Word must become the main priority of the ecclesial community, as it was for Jesus. May it not happen that we profess a God with an expansive heart, yet become a Church with a closed heart – this, I dare say, would be a curse; may it not happen that we preach salvation for all, yet make the way to receive it impractical; may it not happen that we recognize we are called to proclaim the Kingdom, yet neglect the Word, losing ourselves in so many secondary activities or discussions. Let us learn from Jesus to put the Word at the centre, to enlarge our boundaries, to open ourselves up to people, and to foster experiences of encounter with the Lord, realizing that the Word of God "is not encased in abstract or static formulas, but has a dynamic power in history which is made up of persons and events, words and actions, developments and tensions". [1]

Let us now come to the second aspect: the Word of God, which is addressed to all, *calls everyone to conversion*. In fact, Jesus repeats in his preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (*Mt 4:17*). This means that God's nearness is not inconsequential, his presence does not leave things as they are, it does not advocate a quiet life. On the contrary, his Word shakes us, disturbs us, incites us to change, to conversion. It throws us into crisis because it "is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (*Heb 4:12*). Like a sword, the Word penetrates life, enabling us to discern the feelings and thoughts of the heart, that is, making us see where the light of goodness is to be afforded room and where, instead, the thick darkness of vices and sins is to be resisted. When it enters us, the Word transforms our hearts and minds; it changes us and leads us to direct our lives to the Lord.

Here is Jesus' invitation: God has come close to you; recognize his presence, make room for his Word, and you will change your outlook on life. I can also put it like this: *place your life under the Word of God*. This is the path the Church shows us. All of us, even the pastors of the Church, are under the authority of the Word of God. Not under our own tastes, tendencies and preferences, but under the one Word of God that moulds us, converts us and calls us to be united in the one Church of Christ. So, brothers and sisters, we can ask ourselves: Where does my life find direction, from where does it draw its orientation? From the many "words" I hear, from ideologies, or from the Word of God that guides and purifies me? What are the aspects in me that require change and conversion?

Finally – the third step – the Word of God, which is addressed to everyone and calls us to

conversion, *makes us heralds*. Indeed, Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and calls Simon and Andrew, two brothers who were fishermen. With his Word he invites them to follow him, telling them that he will make them “fishers of men” (Mt. 4,19): no longer just experts in boats, nets and fish, but experts in seeking others. And just as in sailing and fishing they had learned to leave the shore and cast their nets into the deep, in the same way they would become apostles capable of sailing upon the open seas of the world, of going out to meet their brothers and sisters and proclaiming the joy of the Gospel. This is the dynamism of the Word: it draws us into the “net” of the Father’s love and makes us apostles moved by an unquenchable desire to bring all those we encounter into the barque of the Kingdom. This is not proselytism because it is the Word of God that calls us, not our own word.

Today let us also hear the invitation to be fishers of men: let us feel that we are called by Jesus in person to proclaim his Word, to bear witness to it in everyday life, to live it in justice and charity, called to “give it flesh” by tenderly caring for those who suffer. This is our mission: to become seekers of the lost, oppressed and discouraged, not to bring them ourselves, but the consolation of the Word, the disruptive proclamation of God that transforms life, to bring the joy of knowing that He is our Father and addresses each one of us, to bring the beauty of saying, “Brother, sister, God has come close to you, listen and you will find in his Word an amazing gift!”

Brothers and sisters, I would like to conclude by simply thanking those who work to make sure that the Word of God is shared, proclaimed and put at the centre of our lives. Thank you to those who study and delve into the riches of the Word. Thank you to the pastoral workers and to all Christians engaged in the work of listening to and spreading the Word, especially lectors and catechists. Today I will confer these ministries on some of you. Thank you to those who have accepted the many invitations I have made to take the Gospel with them everywhere and to read it every day. And finally, I especially thank our deacons and priests. Thank you dear brothers, for you do not let God’s holy people be deprived of the nourishment of the Word. Thank you for committing yourselves to meditating on it, living it and proclaiming it. Thank you for your service and your sacrifices. May the sweet joy of proclaiming the Word of salvation be a consolation and reward for all of us.

[1] *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, Instrumentum laboris for the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 2008, n. 10.
