

**Homily for III (3) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C (Sunday of the Word of God), 23-01-2022 by
Fr. Lubem Robert Waya, osj.**

First Reading: Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10

Psalm: Psalm 19

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Gospel: Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

IS GOD'S WORD THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE?

God's Word cannot be important to you unless you know it and its value. But what does it mean to know God's Word? To know God's Word is to read, study and understand it. Yes, but it is much more than that. You might be able to do this and quote from Genesis to Revelation yet be ignorant of the Word. To truly know the Word of God means that our understanding of scripture must lead us to a personal loving relationship with the Word incarnate. This is why St. Jerome said, 'ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ'. And many years down the line, the Holy Father Pope Francis in continuation of this teaching, would institute on the feastday of St. Jerome, 30th September 2019, the annual observance of Sunday of the Word of God to be on the third Sunday of January as today, to draw our minds to the centrality and importance of scripture in the lives of Christians. But ask yourself, how important is scripture in your life?

To know Scripture is to know Christ the Word incarnate who is the mind, the wisdom and power of God. Hence, all scripture is inspired, and is infused with God's Spirit and Law capable of making our lives spirit-driven. As such, to obey scripture is to obey God and His Law which gives life. The psalmist also affirms this truth saying 'Your Words are Spirit, Lord, and they are life.' This is further emphasised in the historical context of our first reading from the book of the prophet Nehemiah. As the latest historical book of the Hebrew bible, it describes Israel's restoration to Jerusalem after seventy years in Babylon. Even while away, they never lost their heritage because of their observance of the Law of the Lord contained in scripture. If scripture remains our operational manual, like them we too can never be lost no matter how long it may take. Today upon hearing the words of the Law from Ezra, the whole assembly is brought to tears because the Law of the Lord reminds them of their guilt of having wandered from God's ways, but most importantly it opens their minds to the bounteous love God has for them despite their unworthiness.

Indeed, there is power in the Word as Christ led by the Spirit demonstrates today in the synagogue. As the Word incarnate, He is the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. So, God desires that through Him we should have a sure guide to eternal life. That is why He lived in obedience to the law. Today too we see Him act in observance of the law on sabbath, entering the synagogue to teach the essence of the Law as contained in the Word. And He teaches us that the Word of God is spirit and life. In it therefore lies our salvation and liberation from slavery, most especially the slavery to sin. Therefore, when God's Word is correctly proclaimed, it is good news to the poor, freedom to the captives and the downtrodden, sight to the blind, and favour for all. It is so powerful that people also use it for personal gains. But any other use of the Word apart from these is fraud. Ask yourself today, how do you use God's Word?

Today we are all called to be servants of the Word of God and not masters of God's Word. We must be its proclaimers and not Christ's peddlers using the Word for selfish ends. Ask yourself, what is my role in the proclamation of God's Word? A servant of God's Word does not change its meaning. He/she sticks to its truth in word and deed even if it hurts. And indeed, at times it must hurt as we often notice. Because the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but joy and righteousness in the Holy Spirit which demands a conscious attempt to break away from sin to live a holy life. Our only consolation is that such hurt brings eternal gains in the end that cannot be quantified. As St. Paul teaches us today, everyone is necessary in this enterprise...me and you. And together we each have our roles in the Grand Plan of God. As one body of Christ, let us make God's Word the centre of our hearts and lives, and together we would constitute the vehicle to actualize this plan of God. If everyone makes his or her contribution, as long as we remain the one body of Christ we shall transform the world since Christ is our head. May the Word of God find a place in us and remain the centre of our lives so that we can navigate successfully to the end. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.