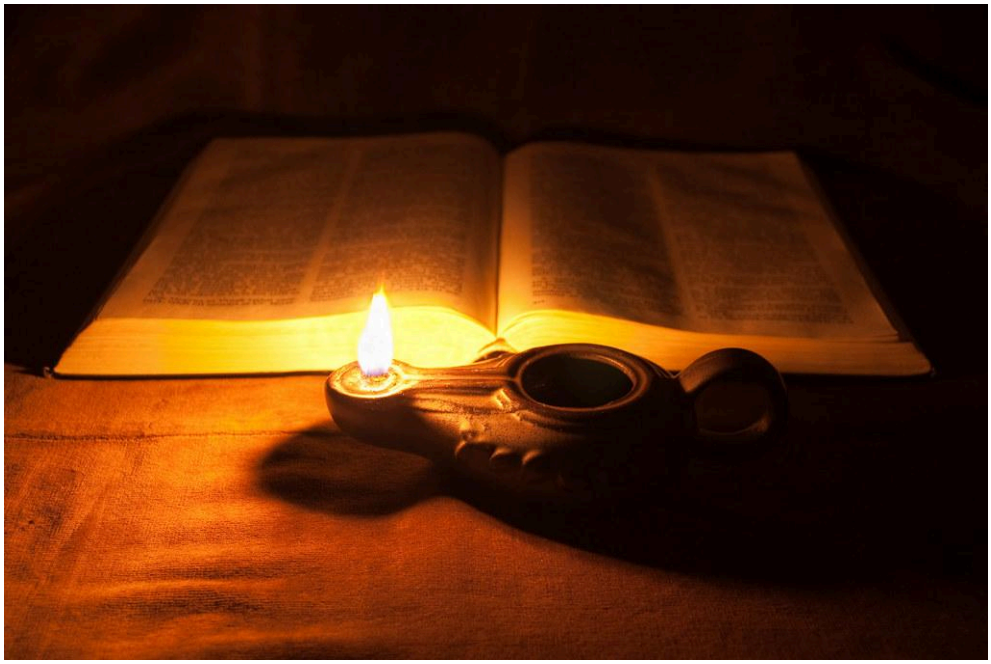
Homily 3rd Sunday of OT: Year A

(January 25, 2020) "Will you let the bible keep you Catholic?"



Audio | Scriptures

A few months ago Pope Francis wrote a letter to the whole Church that instituted this Sunday as the Sunday of the Word of God.
In instituting this Sunday of the Word of God, Pope Francis said this:

The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians. Without the Lord who opens our minds to them, it is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth. Yet the contrary is equally true: without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and of his Church in this world would remain incomprehensible. Hence, Saint Jerome could rightly claim: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ"

Catholics get a bad wrap for being ignorant of Scripture.
Even basic bible trivia seems to stump most. How many books are there in the Bible? (73) What was the name of Abraham's son? What

were the ten plagues that God judged Egypt with? Quick, by a show of hands, how many of you here have passages of the Bible memorized and could quote them? How many of you could from memory tell me the names of all the books of the Bible?

Some Catholics may be quick to protest and say: We are not meant to know Bible trivia but know the message of the Scriptures and what is communicated in them. Or, it doesn't really matter if I can't give you chapter and verse, as long as I know some of the things God says in the Bible, such as Love your enemies, love your neighbor, and Jesus is Lord. There is a lot of truth in these protests. But I still think there is something to having a greater familiarity with the bible and where things can be found in it.

As one who grew up an evangelical Christian in a protestant church, memorizing the books of the bible and passages in the Bible was taught from an early age. During Sunday school classes as a child we would have 'sword drills'. The teacher would say swords up and we would hold the bible over our heads and then the teacher would start quoting a bible verse or story from the bible. When she finished we would bring our bibles down on our laps and would try and find where in the Bible the passage is that she was referring to. You may think this strange and may wonder if this would just encourage a surface level understanding of the Bible. But looking back now, I see that these activities communicated a deeper message about the Bible

and it is this: this is a book unlike any other; it is special; we are to spend a lot of time getting familiar with it and committing to memory what God is saying in it.

Another way I knew the Bible was important from a young age is what I saw in my family. My family was not perfect by any means. But, I do remember as a child growing up seeing my Mom and Dad open their bibles to read them at the start of their day. They would read the Bible with me in the evenings at the end of the day before bed. All this communicated to me that God speaks to us through His Word and His words are important to listen to.

Today, we are seeing a great many of our youth leave the Christian faith altogether. The most shocking stat I saw was that for young boys if they do not see their father practice the faith at home in prayer and bible reading or go to Mass with the family, only 2 percent of those young boys remain practicing the faith by the time they reach the end of high school. Children may be coming to Mass all these years and even may be going to Catholic school, but there is a disconnect that is happening. Young people go to Mass and they are bored and they don't get what is going on. If we are honest, many adults here may be having this same experience. Why is this? One of the reasons is that we may not be encountering the Word of God outside of Sunday Mass.

The Mass comes from the biblical world and language. If we do not spend any time throughout the week immersing ourselves in the bible, the Mass and the whole of the Catholic faith will be, as Pope Francis says, incomprehensible to us. It would be like spending your whole life in our english speaking United States and then spending one hour a week in an arabic speaking Israel or Palestine. Little would resonate or mean anything, especially to a young person.

To put it another way, we feel like we are in the dark. And this is the prominent theme of our Scriptures today: Part of our first reading from Isaiah says: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone."*

The theme of light in the Bible is deeply connected to the Word of God and how God reveals himself to us through it. At the beginning of the Bible we hear the first thing that God creates is light. Think of the famous Psalm: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." We celebrated the conversion of St. Paul this weekend, the patron saint of our parish. Paul's conversion is begun with an encounter with God and being blinded by the light.

In our Gospel today, it says that Jesus goes to live in the land of Capernaum and that this fulfills the prophetic word of our first reading that the light of God is now shining on the land.

Jesus says He is the light of the world. He is revealing the heart of God to his people by his very presence. He is like a giant spotlight walking around shining up to heaven and out to the world. The Gospel of John opens by saying that Jesus the light came into the world, but his own people did not recognize him and rejected him. The hearts of the people had not prepared themselves for Jesus who is described as the light coming into the world. The same is true for us, Jesus reveals himself to us in the Word of God so we may recognize him when he reveals himself to us at Mass and in our Catholic lives of sacraments and service. Jesus wants you to see that he is in all these things.

For Catholics, the Word does not remain on the pages of the Bible, but has come into our midst and continues to come into our midst through reading Scripture, hearing Scripture and participating in the Sacraments. To go to confession is to meet Jesus and hear his Word of forgiveness and mercy through the voice of the priest. To receive the Eucharist is to meet Jesus, the Word. Every moment of our life is meant to be illuminated by the Word of God.

This means the Word of God is not meant to be confined to one hour on Sunday. Maybe you feel overwhelmed by the Bible and have avoided picking it up and reading it. There are some very helpful tools available now that make the Bible less intimidating to read. The Bible Project has created amazing animated videos that are all free on

YouTube. The ones I recommend you begin with are two videos: “What is the Bible?” “The Story of the Bible”. These are made by evangelical Christians but their presentations are geared toward all Christians; not just protestants. A couple weeks ago Fr. Peter encouraged us to commit to reading through the Bible in a year. There is a Bible created by the Augustine Institute called “Bible In A Year”. This Bible arranges readings sequentially from the Old and New Testament for each day of the year.

Have you heard of protestant converts such as Tim Staples, Scott Hahn and Peter Kreeft? All of them have said at some point how “the Bible made them Catholic”. What do they mean by that? It means all the years they spent in the Word of God in their homes and in their churches made it possible for them to recognize the truth, goodness and beauty of the Catholic faith. The bible made them Catholic. My question for you is this: “will you let the Bible keep you Catholic? Will you let the Bible help keep your children Catholic?”

Pope Francis has asked us to let the light of God’s word shine in our lives. This leads me to my last question: How bright is your home? I’m not asking if your light bulbs are bright enough. How are you letting the light of God’s word shine in your life throughout the week? Can I invite you to have a place in your home where you go each day to open the Word of God and read it? This will brighten your home and change your life. Turn off the glow of the TV and the smartphone

and gather around the light of God's Word. Will you take the challenge to brighten your home by making the word of God a central part of it? If you resolve to take this challenge contact Fr. Peter or myself sometime this week and give us this message: "*My house will be a house of prayer where the Word of God is welcomed and read.*" One of us would be happy to come by in the days and weeks ahead to pray a prayer of blessing for you and your home so God's grace may be at work in this commitment!

I conclude this homily with a couple more excerpts from Pope Francis' institution of this Sunday of the Word of God:
"A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ (cf. Rom 10:17), believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the Lord, both in the celebration of the liturgy and in their personal prayer and reflection.

Sacred Scripture and the sacraments are thus inseparable. When the sacraments are introduced and illumined by God's word, they become ever more clearly the goal of a process whereby Christ opens our minds and hearts to acknowledge his saving work."