

## Reflection for 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

The Sunday of the Word of God, which was instituted by Pope Francis is to be celebrated each year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. It is an opportunity to remind the Church of the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Church. Let us reflect on part of the document, "Aperuit Illis" which is the apostolic letter that Pope Francis wrote to commemorate this Sunday.

"Before encountering his disciples, gathered behind closed doors, and opening their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures (cf. *Lk* 24:44-45), the risen Lord appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35). Saint Luke's account notes that this happened on the very day of his resurrection, a Sunday. The two disciples were discussing the recent events concerning Jesus' passion and death. Their journey was marked by sorrow and disappointment at his tragic death. They had hoped that he would be the Messiah who would set them free, but they found themselves instead confronted with the scandal of the cross. The risen Lord himself gently draws near and walks with them, yet they do not recognize him (cf. v. 16). Along the way, he questions them, and, seeing that they have not grasped the meaning of his passion and death, he exclaims: "O foolish men, and slow of heart" (v. 25). Then, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures" (v.27). Christ is the first exegete! (the first to rise from the dead) Not only did the Old Testament foretell what he would accomplish, but he himself wished to be faithful to its words, in order to make manifest the one history of salvation whose fulfilment is found in Christ.

The Bible, as sacred Scripture, thus speaks of Christ and proclaims him as the one who had to endure suffering and then enter into his glory (cf. v. 26). Not simply a part, but the whole of Scripture speaks of Christ. Apart from the Scriptures, his death and resurrection cannot be rightly understood. That is why one of the most ancient confessions of faith stressed that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas" (*1Cor*15:3-5). Since the Scriptures everywhere speak of Christ, they enable us to believe that his death and resurrection are not myth but history and are central to the faith of his disciples.

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.

The journey that the Risen Lord makes with the disciples of Emmaus ended with a meal. The mysterious wayfarer accepts their insistent request: "Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day is now far spent" (*Lk* 24:29). They sit down at table, and Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and offers it to them. At that moment, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him (cf. v. 31).

This scene clearly demonstrates the unbreakable bond between sacred Scripture and the Eucharist. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, "the Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she has venerated the Lord's body, in that she never ceases, above all in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the body of Christ" (*Dei Verbum*, 21).

Regular reading of sacred Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist make it possible for us to see ourselves as part of one another. As Christians, we are a single 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, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness.

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. We should always keep in mind the teaching found in the Book of Revelation: the Lord is standing at the door and knocking. If anyone should hear his voice and open for him, he will come in and eat with them (cf. 3:20). Christ Jesus is knocking at our door in the words of sacred Scripture. If we hear his voice and open the doors of our minds and hearts, then he will enter our lives and remain ever with us."

*Pope Francis, "Aperuit Illis", Apostolic letter of 30 November 2019, paragraphs 6-8 [Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God]*