

Resources to help us Celebrate, Study and Share the Word of God



On the Third Sunday in Ordinary time (which this year will be on Sunday 24 January 2021) the Church celebrates the **Sunday of the Word of God**.

Bishop David Oakley will preside over a Bible Service to mark this occasion at 3pm on Sunday 24 January 2021 which will be live-streamed from Northampton Cathedral.

<https://northamptoncathedral.org/live/>

Please find below a selection of resources and opportunities that you may find useful for your parish or school to further help you to mark this occasion (on the day itself or during the week) and going forward to help us to celebrate, study and share the Word of God.

APOSTOLIC LETTER “APERUIT ILLIS”, POPE FRANCIS (INSTITUTING SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD)

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930_aperuit-illis.html

Hymn on the Word of God (Praise to you Eternal Word)

with Video, PowerPoint and lyrics. Ideal for prayer and acts of worship.

<https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/bible-basics/group-resources/official-hymn-for-the-year-of-the-word/>

Come and See, Bible Timeline

<https://comeandsee.org>

Read the Bible in the Year with Father Mike Schmitz, Ascension Press

<https://ascensionpress.com/pages/biy-registration>

The Mark 10 Mission Primary School Resources

<https://www.themark10mission.co.uk>

A Wealth of Resources from the God Who Speaks Campaign

On the Sunday of the Word of God/ General

<https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/focus/sunday-of-the-word-of-god/>

For Schools/ Education

<https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/education/>

The Wednesday Word

<http://www.wednesdayword.org>

Scripture Resources from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/sacred-scripture/>

The Liturgy Office Scripture Resources

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org/Resources/index.shtml>

Liturgical-Pastoral Resources (Colour Booklets for 2020 & 2021) for the Sunday of the Word of God and Logo

<http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/domenica-parola.html>

Resources and Events from the Catholic Biblical Federation

<https://c-b-f.org/en/Materials/Biblical-Pastoral-Resources/SotWoG-2021#english>

Catholic Biblical Association event with Dom Henry Wansbrough

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bfd4e93ec4eb72444466074/t/6001860eb54a291a39880a65/1610712591015/Catholic-Biblical-Association-GB-Henry-Wansbrough.pdf>

Bible Society Resources

Though not all of these are Catholic resources there is much that is useful here if used selectively. Ecumenical engagement is encouraged in the spirit of Pope Francis' vision for the Sunday of the Word of God:

"This Sunday of the Word of God will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity." (APERUIT ILLIS 3)

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/study-the-bible/>

Resources from the Our Liturgy of the Word Session

Our online session exploring Pope Francis' vision for the Sunday of the Word of God (how Scripture forms our identity as Christians and our everyday living) took place on Tuesday 19 January 2021. The text of the speaking notes are offered below. The website link for the recording of the session will be e mailed out to those who attended and is generally available on request from the NORES office.



Notes from Our Liturgy of the Word Session
'He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures' (Lk 24:45)
The importance of God's Word for Christian identity & everyday living
Tuesday 19 January 2021

1. Opening the Minds of the Disciples

On the first Easter Sunday when the Risen Jesus appeared to his disciples he "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." (Lk 24:45)

It is surprising, shocking even, that this happened *after* the resurrection and not when they were called and began their journey with Jesus. We know that the disciples spent three years with Jesus and, in this resurrection passage, we see that it is only now that He opens their minds to understand the whole story of scripture, the story of salvation.

"[Jesus] said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'" (Lk 24:44-49)

I don't know about you but If it were me I would have opened their minds at the beginning! So often the disciples seem to misunderstand and fail to grasp the big picture of what Jesus is about. Think of how often we read in the Gospels that 'their minds were closed and they failed to understand.'

We too have journeyed with Jesus, some of us for many years or perhaps many decades. The Sunday of the Word of God helps us to remember and recognise that there is always more to discover, that we continually need our minds opening to the scriptures.

Saint Ephrem puts it this way.

"Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has coloured his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that each of us may find a richness in what he or she contemplates"
(Commentary on the Diatessaron, 1, 18).

I invite you then, here and now, to join me in saying this prayer silently, and sincerely from your heart:

Prayer- ***“Lord, open my mind to understand the Scriptures.”***
(A short time of silence follows)

2. The Word of God is Alive!!!

It is important to note that it is the *Risen Christ* who opens their minds.

In his Apostolic Letter (Motu Proprio) *Aperuit Illis* (AI) instituting the Sunday of the Word of God Pope Francis makes it clear that:

“The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians.” (Pope Francis, AI 1)

He underlines the fact that everything depends on our relationship with the Living Lord, the Word of God who took on our flesh, died our death and rose to give us new life.

The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation has provided a beautiful logo for the Sunday of the Word of God.

This logo emphasises our relationship with the Risen Lord also. As the description explains:



The logo is inspired by the gospel passage about the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-33) and highlights the theme of the relationship between the travellers, expressed in looks, gestures and words. Jesus appears as the one who “came near and went with” humanity (Lk 24:15), “standing among them” (Jn 1:14).

Walking among his own, he reinvigorates their steps, pointing to the horizons of evangelisation, depicted in the logo by the star... His words are one with those contained in the scroll he holds in his hands:

“Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals”

(Rev 5: 2). If the two disciples are lost, in the face of the mysteries of history, they are immediately reassured: “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5:5). “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Lk 24:27).

Familiarity with the Word of God arises from the relationship, from the search for the face of God in the Sacred pages. Scripture does not offer us concepts, but experiences; it does not immerse us only in a text, but also opens us to the encounter with the Word of life, “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17)...In the background there is a great light...the Risen One, announces the dawn of a new mission destined for all peoples: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15).

So as Christians, as the community of believers , how is our relationship with the Risen Lord and the Sacred Scripture? These are important questions because they are essential to our IDENTITY.

If I forget who I am, who I belong to, where I have come from, and where I am going there’s a word for that.... LOST!

For we cannot understand scripture unless we have a relationship with the Living Risen Lord who opens our minds to it. It is also true that Scripture will help us deepen our relationship with the Lord and ourselves. In short Sacred Scripture helps us to know and understand God and ourselves.

Pope Francis puts it this way. “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.” (AI 1)

By encountering the Living, Risen Jesus we are made alive!
By encountering the Word of God we are made alive!
“For the word of God is alive and active. (Hebrews 4:12).”

Why is Pope Francis emphasising our relationship with the Word of God? Well we know that, on one level, this is simply part of a very great movement which has taken place over many years in the Church, finding a particular high point at the Second Vatican Council.

“It is fitting...” Pope Francis writes, “that the life of our people be constantly marked by this decisive relationship with the living word that the Lord never tires of speaking to his Bride, that she may grow in love and faithful witness....

The Second Vatican Council gave great impulse to the rediscovery of the word of God, thanks to its Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, a document that deserves to be read and appropriated ever anew. ..To advance this

teaching, Pope Benedict XVI convoked an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”, and then issued the Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini, whose teaching remains fundamental for our communities...” (AI 2)

*Since Vatican II “various local Churches have undertaken a wealth of initiatives to make the sacred Scripture more accessible to believers, to increase their gratitude for so great a gift, and to help them to strive **daily** to embody and bear witness to its teachings.” (AI 2). In England and Wales we think particularly of The God Who Speaks Campaign which has been so fruitful and effective in helping us to engage with scripture.*

3. Metanoia

As we engage with the Scriptures we are changed – they challenge our ways of thinking and doing things.

The Gospel for this Sunday (the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Sunday of the Word of God) is taken from the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel:

““The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent (metanoia), and believe in the good news.” (Mk 1:15)

We know that metanoia means to change, to change one’s life, to change one’s mind, to embrace God, God’s Kingdom and God’s ways.

So there’s an invitation for us....’Change your mind!’

Allow me to ask you a question? It’s a bit of a challenging question:

When was the last time you changed your mind about something?

(Don’t worry, we won’t now have a time of feedback in groups!)

It’s an important question for us to consider though because Jesus often challenged his disciples to change their minds. Regular reading of scripture transforms our minds. Paragraph 12 of the Pope’s letter highlights the fact that “those who draw **daily** nourishment from God’s word become, like Jesus, a contemporary of all those whom they encounter: they are not tempted to fall into sterile nostalgia for the past, or to dream of ethereal utopias yet to come.” (AI 12).

So here we see again a call to the daily reading of the Scripture and a daily living of it.

4. The Characteristics of the Sunday of the Word of God

We now move on to look more specifically at what Pope Francis has in mind for the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God itself. He writes:

“I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the **celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God**. This *Sunday of the Word of God* will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are **encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity**. (AI 3). It’s very fitting then that our celebration on Sunday takes place within the week of prayer for Christian unity.

Let’s look at these three practical aspects he mentions in more detail, that the Sunday of the Word of God is to be a time to be devoted to:

The Celebration of the Word of God

The Study of the Word of God

The Dissemination of the Word of God

As our time is limited I will highlight just a few of Pope Francis’ suggestions but I encourage you to read the whole letter when you have time. Perhaps over the coming years we may think about how we may act on these suggestions of the Pope and how we might embed them into our annual celebrations of this event.

Celebration of the Word of God

Pope Francis remarks that:

“The various communities will find their own ways to mark this *Sunday* with a certain solemnity. It is important, however, that in the Eucharistic celebration **the sacred text be enthroned**, in order to focus the attention of the assembly on the normative value of God’s word. On this Sunday, it would be particularly appropriate to **highlight the proclamation of the word of the Lord** and to emphasise in the **homily** the honour that it is due. **Bishops could celebrate the Rite of Installation of Lectors or a similar commissioning of readers...** Pastors can also find ways of **giving a Bible, or one of its books, to the entire assembly** as a way of showing the importance of learning how to read, appreciate and pray daily with sacred Scripture, especially through the practice of *lectio divina*. (AI 3)

Some ideas and resources to help us celebrate are available in the Liturgical-Pastoral Resource for the Sunday of the Word of God provided by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation.

<http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/domenica-parola.html>

Study of the Word of God

*“...pastors are primarily responsible for explaining sacred Scripture and helping everyone to understand it. Since it is the people’s book, those called to be ministers of the word must feel an urgent need to make it accessible to their community. **The homily**, in particular, has a distinctive function...Helping people to enter more deeply into the word of God through simple and suitable language...*

*For many of our faithful, in fact, this is the only opportunity they have to grasp the beauty of God’s word and to see it **applied to their daily lives**. Consequently, sufficient time must be devoted to the preparation of the homily. A commentary on the sacred readings cannot be improvised. Those of us who are preachers should not give long, pedantic homilies or wander off into unrelated topics. When we take time to pray and meditate on the sacred text, we can speak from the heart and thus reach the hearts of those who hear us, conveying what is essential and capable of bearing fruit. May we never tire of devoting time and prayer to Scripture, so that it may be received “not as a human word but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).*

Catechists, too, in their ministry of helping people to grow in their faith, ought to feel an urgent need for personal renewal through familiarity with, and study of, the sacred Scriptures. This will help them foster in their hearers a true dialogue with the word of God.” (AI 5) While Pope Francis focusses here particularly on pastors and catechists we know that study of the scripture is beneficial for us all, for every disciple.

Suggested Resources

-The Gift of Scripture, a very accessible and useful teaching document by Bishops of England and Wales and the Bishops of Scotland.

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture/index.shtml>

-Come and See Bible Timeline Live Online Course

<https://comeandsee.org>

-Café The Big Picture Course

<http://www.thebigpicturecourse.org>

-The God Who Speaks Course *Echoes of God- Journeying with the Words of God* by David McLoughlin

<https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/the-god-who-speaks/focus/sunday-of-the-word-of-god/echoes-of-god-journeying-with-the-word-of-god/>

-Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies/ Diocesan Certificate in Religious Studies which includes two modules on Scripture (Old Testament and New Testament).

<http://www.nores.org.uk/AdultEducationCCRS/tabid/157/Default.aspx>

-Resources from Biblical Scholar Fr Nicholas King SJ

<https://www.nicholas-king.co.uk>

The Catholic Bible School

<http://www.catholic-bible-school.org>

Dissemination of the Word of God

Pope Francis also strongly emphasises that “the Bible cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few.” And he warns that “at times, there can be a tendency to monopolise the sacred text by restricting it to certain circles or to select groups.” (AI 4) By contrast he notes “the sweetness of God’s word leads us to share it with all those whom we encounter in this life and to proclaim the sure hope that it contains (cf. 1 Pet 3:15-16).” (AI 12)

This presents an immediate challenge to us.

Will we monopolise the Word or share it?

Each of us has opportunities to share the Word of God using the unique gifts God has blessed us with and we must discern and decide what we will do with these.

As we draw these reflections to a close we return once more to the Emmaus disciples. For their eyes also were opened as they recognised Jesus at the table when he broke the bread.

Their eyes were opened to see and recognise Jesus risen from the dead and to understand what up to that point had been hidden from them in the message of the scriptures.

St Luke tells us that as soon as this happened they got up, **at that very instant**, and returned to Jerusalem to proclaim the Good News (c.f. Luke 24:30-34).

May our eyes also be opened.

May our hearts burn, just as theirs did, as we listen to Jesus speaking to us on our journey.

Like the fire kindled in darkness at the Easter Vigil may the real fire, which is the presence and love of our Risen Lord, warm our hearts and rekindle our zeal to share the Gospel.

We pray that the fire of the Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may continue to burn in our hearts and enlighten our minds so that, with eyes opened, we may understand, live and proclaim the scriptures.

Alex Heath, NORES, January 2021



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Acknowledgments: Sunday of the Word of God Logo <http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/domenica-parola/logo.html>