



Bringing Home the Word



Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 24, 2016

Are We Listening?

By Janel Esker

What if today's Gospel played out in your church? A man—someone you've never seen talk—steps to the ambo and reads from the Old Testament. He's a compelling speaker—you feel like you've never heard this passage before, even though it's been read hundreds of times before. He gives it new voice. And then, after finishing the reading, the man declares that he is the fulfillment of what was just proclaimed. The reading was about *him!*

If that were Jesus right in front of you, would you recognize him? Would you

have heard God's word spoken to you, or would you be thinking about work, wondering what the homily would be about, or worrying about those antsy little kids? Would you have missed Jesus present in the proclamation of the word?

Today's first reading from Nehemiah describes a similarly rapt audience—engaged and focused as they listen to God's word. They praise and thank God for the powerful words that leave many of them in tears. Does this scene resemble our weekly liturgies and our experience of reading the Bible? I'm not so sure.

It's easy to take the word of God for granted. We've grown up with the Scriptures, we hear them every week at Mass—we probably have a Bible at home. But do we make God's word a meaningful part of our lives?

How attentive are we to the Mass readings? Do we take time to read the Bible on our own? Jesus is the Word of God made flesh—and he comes to bring glad tidings, freedom, and Good News. †

Sunday Readings

Nehemiah 8:2–6, 8–10

"Ezra read clearly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand."

1 Corinthians 12:12–30

"The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary."

Luke 1:1–4; 4:14–21

"He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah."

A Word from Pope Francis



"Those who have opened their hearts to God's love, heard his voice and received his light, cannot keep this gift to themselves. Since faith is hearing and seeing, it is also handed on as word and light...The word, once accepted, becomes a response, a confession of faith, which spreads to others and invites them to believe."

—*Lumen Fidei*, 37



Lord, your Word is eternal, dynamic, and gives meaning to my life. Increase my desire to spend time with you in sacred Scripture.

—*Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

The Bible: Our Wellspring of Prayer

By Leonard Doohan

The Bible is a wellspring of prayer. It calls to us: “All you who are thirsty, come to the water!” (Isaiah 55:1). We thirst for ways to pray, ways to hear and be heard by our loving God. This thirst is satisfied by Scripture.

Reading the Bible can prepare us for a healthy prayer life: attitudes toward ourselves and God that enable us to enter into a relationship. We experience a sense of mystery, a sense of wonder at the awesomeness of God. We feel helpless, aware of our own poverty and sinfulness before God’s perfection. We experience peace, joy, and blessing in the salvation God offers. We become aware of God’s everlasting love for us, God’s interest in us and presence to our needs. We learn to approach God with trust and love.

In Scripture, Jesus teaches us to pray as he taught his first disciples. The Gospels tell us that he often sought out a quiet spot on a mountain or beside a lake to pray. At times Jesus prayed spontaneously, using his own words as they rose from his heart. At other times he used the best prayers of his own time and culture, often drawing on the same psalms and Old Testament texts available to us. He prayed with intensity—weeping, crying out, kneeling, always sharing with his Father the fullness of his humanity and emotions (Matthew 26:39; Mark 7:34; Luke 22:41; John 11:41; John



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- When do I spend time with the word of God?
- How has Scripture spoken to me and changed my life?

17:1; Hebrews 5:7). When we pray, we offer the day’s ups and downs in grateful praise or with a request for healing.

Jesus prayed at important moments in his life (Mark 14:32; Luke 3:21–22; 9:28–29) and before significant events in his ministry (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 9:18;

11:1). He also went off to pray before or after an ordinary day of traveling through the countryside preaching and healing. For Jesus, life and prayer were the same.

Prayer is the greatest sign of our dependence on God. In our dependence we should pray for what we need. Intercessory prayer, praying for our needs and the needs of those around us, is rooted in Scripture. We pray for others: for leaders and ministers, for the Church, and for the needy. Jesus tells us to pray with confidence: “Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9). This confidence is based on an awareness that the Father knows and desires to give what we need. Jesus taught persistence and perseverance in prayer (Luke 11:5–8). He taught simplicity and sincerity in prayer (Matthew 6:7). Prayer is a way of readying ourselves for God’s will, not a way of changing God’s mind.

Prayer tip: Begin with familiar passages.


For the next week or two, find fifteen minutes to pray a psalm or two or a gospel chapter or parable each day. Be present to the Lord, and allow the Lord to be present to you. Notice how the four main gestures of a prayerful person—petition, praise, thanksgiving, and repentance—weave their way through the passages and through the events of your day. Try different approved translations to increase your comfort with the words and determine which best expresses your prayer style.

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 25–30

Mon. The Conversion of St. Paul: Acts 22:3–16 or 9:1–22 / Mark 16:15–18
Tue. Sts. Timothy and Titus: 2 Timothy 1:1–8 or Titus 1:1–5 / Mark 3:31–35
Wed. Weekday: 2 Samuel 7:4–17 / Mark 4:1–20

Thu. St. Thomas Aquinas: 2 Samuel 7:18–19, 24–29 / Mark 4:21–25
Fri. Weekday: 2 Samuel 11:1–4a, 5–10a, 13–17 / Mark 4:26–34
Sat. Weekday: 2 Samuel 12:1–7a, 10–17 / Mark 4:35–41

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