

Sunday, January 26, 2020

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 8:23–9:3

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Responsorial: Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

Listening to the Word of God and Letting the Light of His Word Shine in Our Hearts

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. (Isaiah 9:1)

On September 30 of last year, Pope Francis issued a letter declaring that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time was to be set aside every year as the “Sunday of the Word of God.” The Holy Father urged pastors to celebrate this day with special homilies, added reverence to the Scriptures in Mass, and by encouraging us to take up the Scriptures anew and find in them the treasures of God’s word for our lives.

In his letter, Pope Francis spoke about how we cannot read the Bible in the same way we read any other book. “Since faith comes from hearing,” he wrote, “and what is heard is based on the word of Christ, 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” (Aperuit Illis, 7).

This “attentive listening” means asking the Holy Spirit, who has inspired the Scriptures, to breathe life into the words we read. It means trying to silence the other voices in our minds and quiet our anxious hearts so that we can hear God’s voice speaking to us. As Pope Francis wrote, “Without the work of the Spirit, there would always be a risk of remaining limited to the written text alone.” But as we take in God’s word prayerfully, it becomes for us “the living word of God, experienced and handed down in the faith of his holy people” (9).

God has a message just for you today, and that message may well be embedded in the readings you will hear at Mass. It will be something personal and inspiring. No one else will hear these readings in exactly the same way that you will. No one else will receive exactly the same message that you will. So practice the attentive listening that Pope Francis described. What is he saying to you? How will the “great light” of God’s word shine in your heart today (Isaiah 9:1)?

“Come, Holy Spirit! Open my ears and my heart to your word today.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. In the first reading, Isaiah prophetically speaks of this great promise: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.* It continues with these words: *You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed.*
 - How has this great promise from Isaiah, which is repeated in the Gospel Reading, been fulfilled in Christ?
 - In what ways has the *yoke* of sin that has *burdened* us been *smashed*?
 - How would you describe the *abundant joy* and *great rejoicing* you have received in Christ?
 - What are some new things you can do in 2020 to make your life greater reflect what you have received?

2. In the responsorial psalm, the beginning words also reflect the promises of the first reading: *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?* It continues with these words: *One thing I ask of the LORD; this I seek: To dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD and contemplate his temple. I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.*
 - In what ways is the Lord your *light* and *salvation* and your *life's refuge*? Why should this cause you to say: *whom should I fear* and *of whom should I be afraid*?
 - The psalmist asks to *dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.* What do these words mean to you?
 - The psalmist also reminds us that we shall *see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living*? Do you believe this can occur here on earth as we *gaze on the loveliness of the LORD*? Why or why not?
 - What role does regular time spent in prayer, worship, and Scripture reading play in this?

3. The Second Reading opens with these words: *I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you.*
 - In these words of the reading, Paul urges those in the church at Corinth to overcome *divisions* and *rivalries* and *be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.* How can you help build greater unity within your parish?
 - January 18-25 is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. What steps can you take individually, and together with others, to pray for and promote Christian unity with non-Catholic Christians?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus' preaching begins with these words: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* It continues with Jesus calling Peter and his brother Andrew: *"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."* *At once they left their nets and followed him.*
 - In what ways does Jesus' beginning words to repent remind you of how important it is for you to have a regularly scheduled examination of conscience, for example, as part of your prayer life? How important should it be? How important to you is the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How important should it be?
 - When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, *At once they left their nets and followed him.* What are obstacles that can keep you from responding when the Lord calls you to follow him? What can you do to overcome them?

5. The meditation opens with these words: "On September 30 of last year, Pope Francis issued a letter declaring that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time was to be set aside every year as the 'Sunday of the Word of God.' The Holy Father urged pastors to celebrate this day with special homilies, added reverence to the Scriptures in Mass, and by encouraging us to take up the Scriptures anew and find in them the treasures of God's word for our lives." The meditation goes on to say that: "God has a message just for you today, and that message may well be embedded in the readings you will hear at Mass. It will be something personal and inspiring."
 - How would you describe your "reverence to the Scriptures in Mass" and for the Scriptures you read outside of Mass? In what ways do you find in them "the treasures of God's word for our lives"?
 - Do you believe that "God has a message just for you today, and that message may well be embedded in the readings you will hear at Mass" and that "It will be something personal and inspiring"? If not, why not?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to "listen attentively to the word of the Lord." Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Come, Holy Spirit! Open my ears and my heart to your word today."