

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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Today, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, is also the Sunday of the Word of God. First, I would like to explain the reason for this, and then to mention a little about the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

### **Celebrating the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as the Sunday of God's Word**

On September 30, 2019, on the inauguration of the 1600th anniversary of the death of St. Jerome, Pope Francis instituted the Sunday of the Word of God on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time through his Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis*. "Aperuit illis" is a Latin phrase taken from the passage about the disciples on their way to Emmaus, as written in Luke's Gospel: "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures." (Luke 24:45)

Through this apostolic letter, the Pope was responding to the desire of the faithful around the world to have a special Sunday to celebrate the Word of God.

It is a short letter consisting of 15 articles. The Pope quotes from one of Paul's letters: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), emphasizing that the Word of God (the Bible) is not the heritage of a few special people, but of God's people. He encourages pastors who serve based on the Word of God (the Bible) not to improvise without preparation, and to strive not to prolong the homily with topics unrelated to the Word of God (the Bible) of the day. If we truly understand the Word of God, it will help us in our salvation. Therefore, we must be careful not to fall into easy, fundamentalist interpretations.

The Pope also introduces Jesus' mother as an excellent model of listening to the voice of God to encourage us to be nourished by the Word of God and to live in the present age with hope, because Mary kept the Word of God in the Bible as a living treasure above all else. Let us always read the Word of God (the Bible) and let it permeate our thoughts and actions.

### **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25)**

The theme of the Week for 2021 is "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit," based

on the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (John 15:5-9). In the northern hemisphere this celebration is held every year during the winter season, but in the southern hemisphere January is a summer vacation time, so they celebrate at other times of the year, for example around Pentecost. Either way, it has a symbolic meaning of the unity of the church.

This year again, on Sunday, January 17, the Pope, at the end of Angelus prayer, invited us to “pray together so that Jesus’ desire might be accomplished – that all might be one” (cf. John 17:21), emphasizing the “unity, which is always higher than conflict.” And, as is the custom in Rome, he will conclude it on January 25 in the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls, presiding over the Vespers with representatives of other Christian communities.

### **The Roots of the Ecumenical Movement**

It all goes back to the years around 1740 in Scotland to trace the birth of a Pentecostal movement with links in North America, whose new message for the renewal of faith calls for “prayer for and with all the Churches.” At that time it was evangelical preacher Jonathan Edwards who called for a day of prayer and fasting for unity, so that the Churches could find their common missionary impulse.

In 1902 Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III, wrote the patriarchal and synodal encyclical *Irenica*, in which he invited to pray for the union of believers in Christ. A few years later, in 1908, Rev. Paul Wattson instituted, and held for the first time in Graymoor (New York), an "Octave of Prayer for Unity" from January 18 to 25, in the hope that it would become a common practice.

In 1964, a historic encounter was recorded. It was in Jerusalem that Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras prayed together the prayer of Jesus: "... they may all be one" (John 17:21). This was also the year when the Second Vatican Council's Decree of Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, was promulgated. It emphasized that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encouraged us to observe the Week of Prayer.

### **A short editation on today's Word (the Bible)**

#### **The Book of Jonah**

The first reading is a short passage from the Book of the prophet Jonah (Jonah 3:1-5, 10). It

is the story of how God sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh to call its people for repentance. We are all familiar with this historical tale: Jonah tried to escape from the mission he had received from God by getting into a ship, but when a great storm arose because of his escape and the ship almost sank, he asked to be thrown into the sea. Instead of being drowned Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, and three days later he was left on the shore. Then he immediately went to Nineveh to proclaim the word of God to its people.

This passage emphasizes that the city was going to be exterminated because of their sins, but they repented through Jonah's preaching and were saved from destruction.

That is the end of today's reading, but the Book of Jonah doesn't end here. Many people might stop reading at this point, but if you read the Book all the way to the end, you see Jonah continue to watch the people of the city at a certain distance even after they repented, waiting for God to punish the city at any moment. But God forgives them in His mercy.

I am reminded of a comment made by Pope Francis: Jonah becomes angry with God because God is too merciful to the people of Nineveh, but the prophet himself needed to discover that God is full of mercy, and moreover, that "the name of God is mercy." May we too overcome Jonah's mentality and be transformed into more and more merciful men and women day by day.

### **The Gospel according to Mark (Mark 1:14-20): Jesus Begins Preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God**

In today's Gospel reading, we read about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry when he began to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. We are told that it was after Herod had captured John the Baptist. We do not know exactly how John's disciples reacted to John's imprisonment in the fortress of Machaerus. But how would Jesus have reacted? Jesus did not stay in the desert, nor did he flee to his family in Nazareth. He began to travel through the villages of Galilee, preaching a new message.

Jesus announces to the people through the miracles and ministries he performs that "the time is fulfilled," that Israel's "time of waiting" is over, that John's time is over and a new time has begun with Jesus, and that God is among us. We call the presence of God in this world the Kingdom of God. We believe that it will be the force that transforms this world into a more just society. We, especially Christians, are called believe that God is always present,

speaking and acting through the gospel and the events of history. As disciples of Jesus, may we be tireless collaborators who build up a new society according to the values of the kingdom that Jesus preached and gave his life to, who live in anticipation of the coming of His kingdom.

#### Prayer

Let us pray that we Christians continue to look for ways of unity to build a truly human society based on the values of the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed through the Gospel.

God our Father, help us to align our hearts with the gospel of Jesus so that we may be signs of your love and carry it to those who do not yet know you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).