

3rd Sun of Ord- Word of God Sun - Ecumenical Sun - Day of Prayer for the Unborn

(Jon 3:1-5,10; Mk 1:14-20)

21 Jan 2024

You may not realize it but we have gathered today for a very busy Sunday.

This weekend not only marks the 3rd Sun of Ordinary Time, but this weekend, we also celebrate Word of God Sunday and Ecumenical Sunday. And if that were not enough, Monday is a World Day of Prayer for the Protection of the Unborn. The prospect of addressing all of these noble concepts in one single homily would appear rather onerous. Then when one realizes that the readings are focused on a few fishermen and a guy who reportedly spent 3 days in the belly of a fish, and the linkage between the assigned themes for the day and the readings seems rather obvious. Does it not? You are correct; it does not! So, I am forced to make a choice. However, whichever angle I choose forces me to give up or abandon something valuable within the remaining themes.

Whenever I hear the call story of fishermen Simon, Andrew and the Sons of Zebedee, I am struck by how much they seemingly gave up in following Jesus. We are led to believe that Jesus called and his disciples simply, without hesitation, abandoned their possessions, their careers and their families without so much as a single glance back. Let's place ourselves in their shoes, shall we? Call to mind something that you truly cherish. Try to think of something that you would struggle to live without, something that you would hate to leave behind. (PAUSE) Our initial thoughts might go to important stuff like cell phones, laptop computers, heirloom jewelry or valuable golf clubs. Upon deeper reflection, I'll bet that most of us thought about how difficult it might be to leave the special people in our lives behind. Nothing wrong with that thought process but remember too, the disciples were not only choosing to leave things behind; they were also choosing to step into the unknown. One of the things that they would have involuntarily taken with them into that unknown would have been their knowledge of Scripture.

As Jewish men, these first followers of Christ would have been forced to memorize the Torah, the first 5 books of our Bible, by their 13th birthday and they would have had some knowledge of the prophets and would have longed for the promised Messiah. To some extent, because of the Hebrew Scriptures, these first disciples possessed the courage required to walk away from their way of life and follow Jesus. As they stepped into the unknown, the Hebrew Scriptures would be a foundation for their faith. Earlier, when I asked each of us to contemplate the elements in our lives that we most cherished, I wonder how many of us included our sacramental lives on our lists. I wonder how many of us cherish our bibles enough to be worried about leaving the Scriptures behind.

While perhaps less obvious, Sacred Scripture, the Word of God, should be on our list of cherished possessions. In the introduction of Lectionary, the collection of readings used at Mass, we are told that “in hearing God’s Word, the church is built up and grows. When we hear the inspired Word of the Holy Spirit, we look back at past events and forward to what is to come. The Word of God tells us what to hope for and where true joy lies.” The bible provides a compass for daily living. Surely, we can all appreciate the value of a compass when undertaking a journey into the unknown. Additionally, without the Scriptures, Jesus the Christ, might easily be misunderstood or even forgotten. For as St. Jerome has said: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

Interestingly enough, the Scriptures also serve as a significant ecumenical tool. The collection of books that we call “the bible” joins us to our Jewish ancestors and in its many translations connects us in some way to all the world’s Christian denominations. The bible provides a basis for both academic scholarship and spiritual nourishment like no other resource given to human kind. I say given because the Scriptures are a gift from God. In that gift, the Holy Spirit makes God’s will known to us by inspiring multiple humans to record God’s voice in

human fashion. In Sacred Scripture, God tells us that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28) All one, created in God’s image and likeness and sharing in God’s love. All one, created by and unified by the shared miracle of conception.

Throughout Scripture, God affirms the value of every human life from womb to tomb. Like the prophet Jeremiah, before our birth, God knew us. Before our birth God loved us and before our birth God chose us and set us apart for the mission of sharing his love. And yet, everyday defenseless children have their lives taken from them while still in the womb. The reasons for this loss of life are complex and have become quite political but there can simply be no denying that a pregnancy ended prematurely denies the world of the cherished gift of a child. A child destined to live in and share the love of God. Monday reminds us of the importance of praying for the unborn children of God and for their mothers. Let us pray for their protection and for the emotional, material and medical support that is necessary for God’s will to be done.

On this cold January Sunday, we have been called to reflect upon the cherished gifts in our lives. Not the least of which are the gifts of Sacred Scripture, Christian Unity, and Human Life. In choosing to touch on all of these themes, I realize that I have short changed all of them to some extent. But if nothing else, I hope that you leave Mass with the knowledge that today is no Ordinary Sunday. For that matter, no Sunday really is. God’s gifts make sure of it!