

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Yr A: Sunday of the Word

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How do we come to know about God, and our eternal destiny?

Well, God reveals Himself to us through nature; i.e., through the created universe. *“The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament shows forth the works of his hands.”*

Yes, the beautiful order that we see in nature – in the created universe, the sun, stars & planets, in the world and all that is in it – reveals that there must be a Supreme Intelligence behind all of creation, an All-Powerful Designer that *placed* things in order and *maintains* them in order.

The ancient pagan philosophers acknowledged this. By contemplating the beautiful order in the universe we can come to know the existence of God.

This is something we call *natural* Revelation.

And with our natural, God-given ability to think and reason, we can know basic morality – that it is wrong to steal, to lie, to murder, etc.

But natural Revelation only takes us so far - to know that God exists. By contemplating nature we cannot know that there are three Persons in one God; that He is a God who loves us and who will bestow upon us everlasting happiness in heaven if we love and obey Him.

These truths we know because God Himself has *revealed* them to us. This is what we call *Divine* Revelation.

*How* has God revealed these truths to us? Through His word. God has spoken to us through His word.

And *how* has His word been revealed to us? In two ways.

One way is through Sacred Scripture – which is the word of God set down *in writing* under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that the sacred writer wrote down only what God wanted written down, and nothing more.

Another way the word of God has been revealed to us is through what we call Sacred Tradition – which is the oral preaching and teaching of Jesus to His Apostles, which has been handed down to us in the teaching of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

So, the word of God has been revealed to us through *both* Scripture and Tradition. To know the fullness of God’s Revelation, the fullness of the truths God wants us to know about Himself and the way of salvation, we need *both* the Bible and the Church; *both* Scripture and Tradition.

Scripture alone does not reveal to us the fullness of the truth about God and His plan of salvation. “*Sola Scriptura*” (Scripture alone) is a Protestant invention, thought up by Martin Luther. Scripture does not interpret itself. In fact, one can interpret verses of the Bible in various ways, even in contradictory ways – this is why there are literally thousands of Protestant sects, each claiming its interpretation is correct.

And this is precisely why Jesus founded the Church as a hierarchy, with the Pope and bishops as our teachers in the faith, to assure that the truths of the faith would be preserved in their fullness.

*Why* am I speaking about these things on this particular Sunday? Because the Pope has proclaimed this Sunday as the “Sunday of the Word of God,” with a special focus on the Bible.

The Bible, the word of God set down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reveals to us not only truths about God; it also reveals His entire plan of salvation, beginning with the creation and fall of man, and God’s plan to redeem us in Jesus Christ which begins to unfold in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament tells about the preparation for the coming of the Savior.

Beginning with Abraham, who lived about 1900 years before Christ, God formed a people, His Chosen People, the Hebrews, later known as the Jews, from whom the Savior, Jesus, would be born.

King David, a descendent of Abraham, lived about 1000 years before Christ. King David united all the tribes of Israel under a single rule.

The 12 tribes were named after the 12 sons of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, whose name was changed to Israel (why they're called Israelites!).

After the death of his son, King Solomon, the kingdom of David was divided into two kingdoms, north and south.

In 721 BC God permitted the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, because the people had fallen away from the true worship of God; in fact, they sacrificed their babies and little children to the pagan gods, who were, in fact, demons.

The Assyrians first conquered the lands of Zebulon and Naphtali, which were located in the northern part of the northern kingdom, in the area known as Galilee.

Our first reading today is from the prophet Isaiah, who lived during this time. Isaiah prophesied that although the Lord first degraded these two lands (i.e., He allowed them to be conquered and become paganized), these two lands, Zebulon and Naphtali, which were in darkness and gloom, would be the first to see "a great light" – i.e., Jesus Christ, who is the great light that has come into the world:

*"the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone . . . And has brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing."*

As we see in today's Gospel from St. Matthew, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled because Jesus began His preaching in the area of Zebulon and Naphtali, in Galilee (northern Israel). St. Matthew quotes Isaiah:

*"Land of Zebulon and land of Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light."*

Jesus begins His preaching with these words: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Christ's kingdom would not only be the Jews, the 12 tribes of Israel, but all peoples of all nations.

This is made clear in the Gospel today: Jesus calls His first Apostles, Peter and Andrew, then James and his brother John, who were fishermen, and tells them they will become “fishers of men.” Later, just before He ascends into Heaven, Jesus gives them the “great commission” – “Go and preach to all nations, teaching them everything I have taught you; and baptize them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Ever since then, the Good News of the Gospel, the revealed word of God, has been preached to the ends of the earth.

Yes, in Christ, the prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled. In Jesus Christ, our world that was in darkness has seen a great light.

Jesus, with His suffering, death and resurrection, has broken the yoke of slavery and sin, and has allowed us to be God’s children through baptism, members of His Church, His kingdom on earth, to enjoy eternal life with Him and reign with Him forever in Heaven.

Reading the Bible is a beautiful and constructive way to see how God’s marvelous plan of salvation has unfolded, and to come to better know Jesus Christ. St. Jerome has a famous saying: “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

The Pope wants us to carry the spirit of this Sunday throughout the upcoming year, and to read and meditate upon Sacred Scripture, the revealed word of God.

Why not make a plan to read Scripture daily during this upcoming year?

One can go to Catholic sources on the Internet and get an outline to read the Bible, or most of it, in a year.

Holy Catholic Family Bookstore sells a Bible divided daily so that one can read it in a year. They also sell a New Testament one can read in a year.

Reading the Bible daily is a wonderful way to better learn the truths of our faith and to attain a deeper love and devotion to Jesus, who is the true Light of the world.

