

## Homily of Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

(The Sunday of the Word of God)

Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; Psalm 19:8-10, 15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Last Sunday, we reflected on the desolate situation of the Israelites when they returned from the Babylonian captivity. They found Jerusalem in ruins. Its temple, walls, and buildings were razed to the ground. God assured them through Prophet Isaiah that he, their Builder, would not be silent. He would rebuild them in such a way that they would be called by a new name. At that time, Nehemiah was their governor, and Ezra was their priest. While the structural reconstruction and restoration were going on, Ezra led the people to a spiritual restoration. Spiritual restoration was necessary because the Israelites were exposed to the worship of other gods in Babylon, which produced a generation that did not properly follow the covenant between God and their ancestors.

A major part of the renewal of the covenant was the reading of the Book of the Law to the people. The assembly was made up of young and old. Ezra read the word of God to the assembly from morning to midday. When the people heard the story of God's relationship with their ancestors and how they, themselves, had violated the covenant and disconnected themselves from God, they wept in sorrow and repentance.

In the same way, we also need to reflect on our relationship with God. An honest reflection will help us to see God's faithfulness and our unfaithfulness, and the areas of our disconnection from him. At the beginning of a new year, one of our primary concerns should be to resolve to renew our covenant with God and have a closer relationship with him.

Ezra read out the word of God from daybreak till midday "and all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law." Do we have the Bible? How much time do we spend reading it? How attentive are we to the word? Many people do not mind the time, the energy, and the resources they spend on worldly activities while they are very slow concerning spiritual matters.

This Sunday, the Church marks the sixth Sunday of the Word of God, a day instituted by Pope Francis on September 30, 2019, to emphasize the significance of the Sacred Scripture. The theme for this year is taken from the Psalms: "I hope in Your Word" (Psalm 119:81). The Sunday of the Word of God draws our attention to *Lectio Divina*, meaning, divine reading which involves reading the word, reflecting on the word, and praying with the word. The celebration today offers Christians an opportunity to renew their commitment to reading and meditating on the Bible as a fundamental tool for growth in faith and spiritual life, as well as a source of hope.

A very noticeable expression of the close the relationship of our ancestors and God and the Church is the names of some countries, states, counties, towns, institutions, children, festivals, programs, and so on. While many of us have continued such close relationship, we have a generation, not only that they distaste God and the Church, they insist on taking down the expressions of the relationship.

While the first reading invites us to renew our relationship with God, St. Paul invites us in the second reading to examine our relationship with our fellow human beings and restore the unhealthy ones. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21).

St. Paul writes in the second reading, “But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’ ... So that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. *If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy*” (1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

In the gospel, Jesus declares his mission by reading from the scroll of Prophet Isaiah. The gospel invites us to continue Jesus’ mission to bring good tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, bring recovery to the blind, and set the oppressed free. Among us and around us are the poor who need assistance, people who are going through various types of afflictions that need support, and cases of injustice that need to be addressed. As we begin a new year, it would be good to include in our resolutions to participate in Jesus’ mission beginning from our environment. Charity begins at home.

The readings of this Sunday properly address the Sunday of the Word of God, which we celebrate today. In the first reading, Ezra read the word of God to the assembly. In the second reading, St. Paul urges us to live out the word in our relationship with one another. In the gospel, Jesus read the word of God to the assembly, and we are challenged to continue the mission of Jesus. May God’s word penetrate our hearts and restore us. May God’s word give us joy and move us to become disciples of Jesus who joyfully and actively continue his mission wherever we are. May the joy of the Lord be our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Amen.

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