

# The Third Sunday of Ordinary Time — January 26, 2020

On September 30th last year, the Feast Day of St. Jerome, our Holy Father Pope Francis, declared that the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time would be recognized henceforth as Dei Verbum or “Word of God” Sunday. He was recognizing the huge volume of works by St. Jerome, the great biblical scholar, that have so influenced our understanding of Scripture in the Catholic Tradition. He used the passage from St. Luke (24:32) the Two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, as the launching pad:

**“Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us”**

Our Holy Father proclaimed this day as “Sunday of the Word of God” encouraging us to open up the Scriptures to our Catholic people .....that the Word might burn in their hearts, also.

At the beginning of Advent, I invited you to begin reading the Gospel of St. Matthew since we will be following him closely throughout the weekends of this year. And I am delighted to hear from many of you that you are already doing that ! May the richness of this Word burn in our hearts. I would like you to especially read during the course of this week, Matthew 5: 1-12 .....it follows directly on today’s Gospel, but it will not be proclaimed next weekend because we will be celebrating the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and we will hear the story of the Presentation from Luke ! I believe if those first 12 verses in Matthew 5 were truly understood and applied and integrated into our lives, we would have all of the essential teaching incorporated into our lives. These verses set the tone for all He will do, all He will witness, and all He will proclaim throughout this journey.

So looking at today’s readings, ....how powerful they are as we celebrate “Word of God Sunday” ! One thing we notice is the mention of ‘Zebulun and Naphtali’ in the First Reading from the prophet Isaiah, and again in the Gospel Reading from St. Matthew ! Gives you a sense that there is something very important about these places, right ? And yes, there sure is !

The Gospel is a description of the beginning of Jesus’ public Ministry. He leaves Nazareth and goes to Capernaum by the sea, not because He wants to be a beach-surfer, but because His Mission has been crystallizing for Him all of this time. His Vocation was coming into full light. 700 years before the arrival of Jesus on those shores, the Assyrians had conquered this territory of Galilee. Those Jews they didn't kill were banished into exile. The Assyrians did this to all nations that they conquered, to prevent them from regrouping and rebelling against them. The Assyrians moved a lot of pagans into Galilee to replace the exiled Jews !

Now, in Jesus' time 700 years later, there were a lot of pagans living there as well as Jews who had moved back, so the population was pretty mixed. The Prophet Isaiah, who was living in Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian conquest of Galilee, foresaw good things for the area despite the devastation the Galileans experienced. Isaiah said 'a great light would shine upon Galilee that would bring them abundant joy' ! If this Reading sounds familiar to you, it may just be because you heard it a month ago as a part of the 1st Reading for Christmas.

St. Matthew, in today's Gospel, is telling us that Jesus' Ministry in Galilee was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. It would have been normal for a religious teacher like Jesus to begin His teaching and preaching mainly in Jerusalem. But no ..... He began His ministry in Galilee, in these two Readings (1st & Gospel), Galilee is referred to by the names of the two tribes of Israel that originally settled there : Zebulun and Naphtali ( 2 sons of Jacob) !

So, why do you think he began His Ministry here in Galilee?

a.) Was it because it was ordained from the beginning, fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah?

b.) Was it because of the struggle of His people and the effort they had to put into surviving and living their faith ?

c.) Was it because His mission was to the poor and the 'poor in spirit' ?

d.) Was it because He felt the need to get away from His neighbors in Nazareth?..... Remember, Luke recounts they tried to kill Him ..... 'That prophet not accepted among His own.'

e.) Or, was it all of the above ?

How interesting that it comes into full view with the imprisonment of John the Baptist. John, the greatest prophet of all, introduces Him and then recedes into the background. What is that all about? Keep it in mind as you journey through St. Matthew! His message is just the same as John the Baptist :

"From that time on Jesus began to preach and say,  
**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

From there, He calls the first disciples, which I intentionally did not read because we have just completed a study on that piece in Linda Rooney's great book ! He invites the disciples to leave their nets behind and follow Him. As we begin this New Year and journey throughout Ordinary Time with St. Matthew, wouldn't it be wonderful if every time we came to Eucharist we asked ourselves :

**What do I need to Repent of today? ..... What nets do I need to let go of? ..... So that I may join Him in the proclamation of God's kingdom !** What a difference that would make in my life !!!!

— Fr. Gerry Hurley