

Readings: [Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

Words have power.

I think most of us have experienced a charged motivational discourse. Maybe it was a coach before a game, someone running for office, a teacher in school, at a convention or rally, a TED Talk, a movie scene just before the battle... words that penetrate deep into the emotion of the listener and inspire battle cries, tears, rage or hope, action...

Words have the power to inspire and push us to reach new limits, to conquer thresholds, to set new possibilities, after all your only limitation is your imagination.

You see, you've got to push yourself because no one else is going to do it for you. Oh we like comfort don't we, but great things never come from comfort zones, so get out there! Dream it. Wish it. Do it! And the harder you work for something, the greater you'll feel when you achieve it.

Now, it takes hard work, so don't stop when you are tired, stop when you're done. That means waking up every morning with determination. Do that, and you will go to bed with satisfaction!

Imagine, ending every day feeling completely satisfied for all that you accomplished. Now, that, is a purpose driven life... Do you want it? A life of purpose, a life of meaning? I know you do, we all do, so do something today that your future self will thank you for!

No it's not going to be easy... it's going to be hard, but hard does not mean impossible, you just have to want it bad enough. How bad

do you want it? Bad enough to just let another day go bad and not do a single thing about it?

Your time, your life, is way too valuable to waste standing by. Stop waiting for opportunities to come... create them... because the key to success is to focus on goals, not obstacles! Only you can change your life. No one can do it for you!

Feeling motivated? I just googled a bunch of motivational phrases and put them together. Words... yeah... **they have power...**

The basis of today's reflection is on the power of words... but not just any word... *the word of God, which is living and effective, sharper than any two-edge sword.... A word that penetrates the soul and spirit, joints and marrow and cuts right to the heart.*

There is a difference between the word of God, and words of motivation. Unfortunately, most of us treat the word of God as merely a source of motivation when we need a pick-me-up... I've seen my share of "Nothing is impossible for God" signs. We like to take the nice bible passages and adorn our homes with them, the ones that sound nice, that make us feel good.

But motivation only lasts so long, it ends up being just a brief sentimental instrument but nothing else, nothing lasting, nothing concrete.

Now I would argue that most of us *do not mean* to *use* the word of God for our benefit when we need it. I think most of us people of faith really do accept and believe that the word of God is powerful, *we just don't give the word of God the place that it should take in our lives to*

understand and experience how it is effective in a way that is permanent.

That is what Jesus is trying to help the rich young man understand in Mark's gospel. Like most of us, his heart was in the right place, he wanted to do the right thing, he was **familiar enough** with the word of God to know that there was the promise of eternal life, heaven, and he wanted it, honestly, he did. But like most of us, he did not spend enough time with the word of God to truly understand what it meant and what it required of him to get there.

He thought that heaven was another place, perhaps a distant land or some other realm up in the sky, it is a very common view of reality present in most cultures, the three-tiered heaven, earth, and hell. So, to jump from earth to heaven and not fall from earth to hell, most cultures come up with things they have to do. In the Jewish context, you follow the law, the commandments, and religious rituals. This also keeps people at panic, always feeling insecure, doing everything possible to avoid hell and make it to heaven, that they end up grasping on to the only thing that brings them security in the now, which often times, is material things. The more money in the bank, the more secure I feel for the future.

But Jesus is turning that around. Jesus is helping us realize that heaven and hell are not some other dimensions... remember *Gehenna* from a few weeks ago, that actual physical place of human and ecological destruction? In some ways hell is already here and people live in it when they choose self-interest. So too with heaven...

Heaven is the Kingdom of God, it is not a completely different realm somewhere up there, it is the presence of God, a presence that in

the future (we call that *the age to come*) *will* be fully visible and integrated with the *present age*. However, Jesus came to initiate this “process,” so while the Kingdom of God is yet to be fully realized, we should live in a way that reflects heaven on earth now, that is the mission of the Church, which for us means placing our hopes and security solely on God’s promise, and not in things that bring us a sense of security right now. Matthew and Luke would put it another way in their gospels: “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”

This way of looking at life is not, “natural” to us, it is not a conclusion to which we can arrive to on our own... we need to be in relationship with the word of God to understand it, but in a real relationship, not just knowing the nice passages that make us feel good. I am yet to walk into a home and see on the wall a nice poster that says, “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out!” We need to be willing to feel the tension that comes with God’s word, that double edge sword.

When St. Paul describes the word of God, he is referencing Psalm 95. Psalm 95 talks about the promise of eternal life. That is one edge of the sword, the good news. However, the other side of the sword is the warning that this promise will come whether we join in or not... But choosing to join in should not be out of fear, otherwise we are inclined to cling to things to feel safe... if we really understand the word of God as a good promise, then there is nothing to fear...

So St. Paul is making an appeal to this dual reality of the word of God and identifies Jesus as that word... St. Paul gives us the good news, that in Jesus Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God... one

side of the sword... but at the same time, Jesus exposes the heart, unveils the sin within us that we have been reflecting on these past few weeks, so the follow up, the other side of the sword is: what will you do about it?

It begins with, as the book of Wisdom in the first reading proclaimed: prayer. ***I prayed.** I prayed and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to riches, for they are nothing in comparison.*

Think about it this way, **the power of God's word in our lives begins when our own voice calls upon God's promise in prayer. Meaning, there is power in our own words when they are directed towards the promise of God.** That is how we enter into relationship with the Word, Christ. The second step is getting to Christ more deeply through actual scripture. The bible is a gift for us... after second vatican council, the Spirit moved the Church to making scripture central in the life not just of our liturgy, but our own lives, our homes. Dei Verbum: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful because ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ."

Maybe a good resolve is to join a bible study, to finally pick it up seriously so that it becomes part of who you are and let the dependency on the word be what directs your heart.

Jesus does not want to be your motivational speaker; Jesus wants to be your God. Your all. Your way. Your truth. Your life... Promises to give you what you need to enter the Kingdom of God. He gives you his word. Will you give him yours?