

Before we talk about the readings today, I would be remiss not to mention that besides today being the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary time, by decree of Pope Francis, it will now be known as the “Sunday of the Word of God.” Francis had been toying with this idea during the year of mercy back in 2016 and he finally made it official this past summer. Now, if you think like I do, you want to know three things. Why did he do this? What does it mean to you and me? And why did he choose the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary time as opposed to any other Sunday?

In his own words, the reason he made the change was “to deepen our appreciation, love, and faithful witness to God and His word.” By reading and studying the (Sacred) Scriptures we can come to know Jesus better, discern His ways more deeply, and recognize how He is working in our lives and the world around us. We should never take the Word of God for granted but instead, let it nourish us and deepen our relationship with Christ and each other.

Well that’s a little heavy for this early in the morning... for me

anyway. Let's think it through. Why are we here every Sunday? I hope it's more than just to see each other, sing a few songs, and hope there's an entertaining homily. We are here to encounter Jesus Christ and we do it primarily through the sacrament of the Eucharist and through the Word of God. That's why the Mass is laid out as the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Word.

Do we, as Catholics, *really* reverence the Scriptures all that much? Don't believe what others who have an axe to grind with the Church say. Look at what the official Church documents say, or better yet, to find out what we really believe, look at how we pray, look at the liturgy. At Mass we only hold up two things: one, the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ under the appearance of consecrated bread and wine and two, the Book of the Gospels. One is God who became man for our benefit. The other is the "divinely" inspired word, interpreted and put to paper by man. Both are the Word of God. The Eucharist is the most intimate encounter with Christ. But it is primarily through Scripture that we come to know Him. Initially, to know *about* Him, then ultimately (as Father said in his

homily last week) to really know Him. We should never take that for granted. By that, I mean the privilege we have been given to know and encounter Him.

As most of you know I'm a grandfather. Monica and I have four grandchildren and this Spring, God-willing, there will be two more. That's a great gift for someone my age. I love every moment I can spend with them. But I admit I have one regret. Those grandchildren will not know their great-grandparents.

Monica's parents were the best. Anyone who encountered them wanted to be with them. They made you feel like you were the most important person in the room. They were always encouraging and affirming, never critical or disparaging. And when they interacted with each other, you could see the love. It was infectious. You wanted what they had. And if you got to know them, you came to realize it was because their relationship was based on their love and their faith. Sadly, even though we can tell our grandkids stories, and even show them some video, they may come to know "about" their great grandparents, but in this life, they will never really know

them like we did. We can only hope, when it's all said and done, we all have the opportunity in our heavenly existence to be together so they can finally meet them. I would love to make those introductions.

The problem, of course, is that they aren't here anymore. But that's not the case with Jesus. True, his glorified body isn't visible, but he makes himself available, through the Church, through the sacraments, and through Holy Scriptures. That's key. Scripture, with the help of the Holy Spirit, has the ability to take us from just learning *about* Jesus, to literally encountering Him. Many times, Father speaks about having a beautiful sense of our faith. To me, that's what happens when we move from just gaining knowledge about Jesus to actually encountering Him. Because that's when everything changes. Sorrow turns to hope. Hope becomes joy: knowing we are loved infinitely. And that message must be shared.

OK, so why did Pope Francis select the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time? I read through the entire document and it wasn't totally clear to

me. Probably because it falls after the week of Christian unity. But it turns out the timing is quite appropriate.

In the gospel selections from Christmas through the Baptism of our Lord, we hear “about Jesus”, that is what happens to Him. But by the 3rd Sunday, it all changes: Jesus begins His ministry. He takes action. He speaks. He teaches.

So, let’s look at our gospel today. What does Jesus do? He goes to Galilee, preaches, teaches, heals, and then calls His first disciples. Why Galilee? When the kingdom of Israel first fell in the 8th century BC, it fell for two reasons. Internally, it was corruption and sin. Externally, it was an attack from the north by the Assyrians. The first two lands of the kingdom to fall and be lost were Zebulun and Naphtali: the land around Galilee. As we saw in the first reading, Isaiah foretold that these lands which fell into death and darkness would someday be the first to see the great light of freedom. So that’s where Jesus began his public ministry. And the Jews who read Mathew’s gospel would totally make the

connection. Jesus was that light of their salvation. Of course, Jesus didn't free the nation from their current Roman overlords or try and re-establish the old kingdom. He came to free the people from the ultimate source of oppression, their sin, and to declare the establishment of the kingdom of heaven which can never be overthrown. And finally, Jesus calls His first apostles: those in whom He will entrust His ministry.

Is this relevant for us? Can these events from 2000 years ago help us to know and experience Christ now? Well, we certainly could use the message of repentance, that never seems to go out of style. And the calling??? We're here, aren't we? We come to nourish ourselves on the Word of God and Bread of life, don't we? Now, we just need to ask ourselves, what is Christ calling us to do? Not sure? Then we keep coming back to the Word of God to find out. We look deeper. We pray. Whether on our own, in a study group, or at Mass. The answer lies with our encounter with Jesus Christ.