

WOOLHAMPTON PARISH

POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC LETTER

ON THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

(EXTRACTS)

I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This *Sunday of the Word of God* will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the *Sunday of the Word of God* has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity. (para. 3)

The return of the people of Israel to their homeland after the Babylonian exile was marked by the public reading of the book of the Law. In the book of Nehemiah, the Bible gives us a moving description of that moment. The people assembled in Jerusalem, in the square before the Water Gate, to listen to the Law. **They had been scattered in exile, but now they found themselves gathered “as one” around the sacred Scripture (Neh 8:1).** The people lent “**attentive ears**” (*Neh 8:3*) to the reading of the sacred book, realizing that in its words they would discover the meaning of their lived experience. The reaction to the proclamation of was one of great emotion and tears. (para 4)

Before encountering his disciples, gathered behind closed doors, and opening their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures (cf. *Lk 24:44-45*), the risen Lord appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem (cf. *Lk 24:13-35*). Saint Luke’s account notes that this happened on the very day of his resurrection, a Sunday. The two disciples were discussing the recent events concerning Jesus’ passion and death. Their journey was marked by sorrow and disappointment at his tragic death. They had hoped that he would be the Messiah who would set them free, but they found themselves instead confronted with the scandal of the cross. The risen

Lord himself gently draws near and walks with them, yet they do not recognize him (cf. v. 16). Along the way, he questions them, and, seeing that they have not grasped the meaning of his passion and death, he exclaims: “O foolish men, and slow of heart” (v. 25). Then, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures” (v.27). Christ is the first exegete! Not only did the Old Testament foretell what he would accomplish, but **he himself wished to be faithful to its words, in order to make manifest the one history of salvation whose fulfilment is found in Christ.** (para. 6)

**Regular reading of sacred Scripture
and the celebration of the Eucharist
make it possible for us to see ourselves
as part of one another.**

**As Christians, we are a single people,
making our pilgrim way through history,
sustained by the Lord, present in our midst,
who speaks to us and nourishes us.**

A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a year-long event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord, who continues to speak his word and to break bread in the community of believers. For this reason, ***we need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness.*** (para. 8)

**The Bible is not a collection of history books or a chronicle,
but is aimed entirely at the integral salvation of the person.**

The evident historical setting **of the books of the Bible** should not make us overlook their **primary goal**, which is **our salvation**. Everything is directed to this purpose and essential to the very nature of the Bible, which takes shape as ***a history of salvation in which God speaks and acts*** in order to ***encounter*** all men & women ***& to save them from evil & death.*** (para. 9)