

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday (A)

26<sup>th</sup> January 2020

‘Sunday of the Word of God’

Is 8–9: *land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali ...*

1Cor 1: *make up the differences between you ... be united in your belief & practice*

Mt 4:12–23: *Jesus began His preaching ...*

As you’re already aware, this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time has been declared by Pope Francis also to be kept as the ‘Sunday of the Word of God.’ Now, why might this be? I can think of several answers to that question.

1. First, in general, I can see that the Pope is simply encouraging us to be much more conscious of, and devoted to, a reading of the Holy Scripture. Are we diligent enough in taking the Scriptures and in meditating on these sacred passages? — no, I suspect not. So, for starters, then, with this annual commemoration the Pope is simply urging us to take seriously our Christian duty to know the bible better.
2. In Advent, for example, we spent those 4 Sundays on a brief excursion through the types of passages that we hear at Mass: OT Reading, Psalm, NT Reading (epistle), and Gospel. The 5–10mins we get each Sunday in the Liturgy of the Word, however, is barely enough to sustain us for the week, is it? We are invited by the Church to be much more attentive to the Word of God than that, through personal

reading of the Scriptures. The most accessible part of the Bible, of course, is the New Testament, most specifically, the Gospels, and it is for that reason that at the end of Mass I shall be blessing some slim copies of St Matthew’s Gospel for you to consider taking home today.

3. Why has the Pope chosen this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time to be the ‘Sunday of the Word of God’? I suspect it is because on this Sunday each year we begin to read the ‘Gospel of the year,’ as it were. There’s been Advent and Christmas, finishing with the Baptism of the Lord, and then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year we always hear from St John. But come this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, we always have the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee, whether from Matthew, Mark, or Luke (according to the year: A / B / C). It’s ideal, then, to focus on this beginning of the cycle of readings that — apart from Lent & Eastertide — will take us through to the end of the Church year in November. What better point at which to draw our attention to the Word of God, than when the Son of God Himself, Jesus, opens His mouth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom?

Some background, then, to St Matthew might be in order, as we take up his Gospel for the year ahead. Mathew is, of

course, one of the 12 Apostles, so we believe that the origins of this Gospel are very early. Some claim a basis in an early Aramaic original text, now lost, that was updated and extended into the Greek text that we have today in the NT. It would have been written down some time around 70AD, and is considered the most 'Jewish' of all the Gospels. What this means, then, is that Matthew's Gospel seems to have been written for a community dominated by Christians drawn directly from Jewish backgrounds. For this reason, Matthew is fuller than any of the other Gospels with quotations from the OT. All of the other Gospel writers do it, but none so much as Matthew. Apparently he has 41 citations from the OT, constantly showing how the life and ministry of Jesus fulfil perfectly all that the Israelites were expecting of the Messiah. Even today, in the very first passage about the ministry of Our Lord, a couple of verses in, Matthew connects the message of Jesus with the Old Testament: Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in the early preaching of Jesus in the "land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, ... Galilee of the nations ...". What are we seeing

here but the Word of God (Isaiah, OT) being completed, fulfilled, seamlessly proclaimed, in the words that come from the mouth of Jesus. St Matthew is, like all the Gospel writers, attesting that Jesus is the *Word of God incarnate*.

St Jerome, on whose feastday back on September 30<sup>th</sup> was launched the 'Year of the Word,' famously said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." And it is to know and love the Lord Jesus more that we desire to hear and read the Word of God more fully in this year. Today, let's accept that challenge, because the blessing that comes from it is a closer, fuller, knowledge of the heart of our Saviour. We cannot imagine our Christian lives, or our adherence to Jesus, surely, without these blessed words that the Spirit inspired the sacred authors to set down. They are the living word of God, calling to us, giving fuel to our faith. Jesus calls to us just as directly as He called to Peter & Andrew, James & John. They responded to His call immediately and with their whole lives. So can we, as we hear that call coming to us out of the Gospel pages, truly the living Word of God: may we treasure it and savour it!