

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: Sunday of the Word of God ...

In this month of February, we are proposing a reflection on Pope Francis' homily of the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Sunday of the Word of God. We have chosen this text because its content speaks to us particularly since the Word of God - the Gospel – is the basis of our way of life.

Good reflection and good sharing.

Recall: A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

FEBRUARY 2020 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening prayer or song (according to the Ritual or a song chosen by the fraternity)

Introduction

While listening to the celebrant on the Sunday of the Word of God, I said to myself: what does this homily say to me, a member of the Franciscan Family! And then, I remember this excerpt from article 4 of our form of life: *Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel.* Therefore, we proposed working together the text of the homily.

“Jesus began to preach” (Mt 4:17). With these words, the evangelist Matthew introduces the ministry of Jesus. The One who is the Word of God has come to speak with us, in his own words and by his own life. On this first Sunday of the Word of God, let us go to the roots of his preaching, to the very source of the word of life. Today's Gospel (Mt 4:12-23) helps us to know how, where and to whom Jesus began to preach.

1. How did he begin? With a very simple phrase: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 17). This is the main message of all Jesus' sermons: to tell us that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. What does this mean? The kingdom of heaven means the reign of God, that is, the way in which God reigns through his relationship with us. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, that God is near. Here is the novelty, the first message: God is not far from us. The One who dwells in heaven has come down to earth; he became man. He has torn down walls and shortened distances. We ourselves did not deserve this: he came down to meet us. Now this nearness of God to his people is one of the ways he has done things since the beginning, even of the Old Testament. He said to his people: “Imagine: what nation has its gods so near to it as I am near to you?” (cf. Dt 4:7). And this nearness became flesh in Jesus.

This is a joyful message: God came to visit us in person, by becoming man. He did not embrace our human condition out of duty, no, but out of love. For love, he took on our human nature, for one embraces what one loves. God took our human nature because he loves us and desires freely to give us the salvation that, alone and unaided, we cannot hope to attain. He wants to stay with us and give us the beauty of life, peace of heart, the joy of being forgiven and feeling loved.

We can now understand the direct demand that Jesus makes: “Repent”, in other words, “Change your life”. Change your life, for a new way of living has begun. The time when you lived for yourself is over; now is the time for living with and for God, with and for others, with and for love. Today Jesus speaks those same words to you: “Take heart, I am here with you, allow me to enter and your life will change”. Jesus knocks at the door. That is why the Lord gives you his word, so that you can receive it like a love letter he has written to you, to help you realize that he is at your side. His word consoles and encourages us. At the same time it challenges us, frees us from the bondage of our selfishness and summons us to conversion. Because his word has the power to change our lives and to lead us out of darkness into the light. This is the power of his word.

Reflection and Sharing:

After the reading of the preceding text, take time to share your thoughts on the following question - what do we retain from this text from our Pope Francis?

2. If we consider where Jesus started his preaching, we see that he began from the very places that were then thought to be “in darkness”. Both the first reading and the Gospel speak to us of people who “sat in the region and shadow of death”. They are the inhabitants of “the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, on the road by the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations” (Mt 4:15-16; cf. Is 8:23-9:1). Galilee of the nations, this region where Jesus began his preaching ministry, had been given this name because it was made up of people of different races and was home to a variety of peoples, languages and cultures. It was truly “on the road by the sea”, a crossroads. Fishermen, businessmen and foreigners all dwelt there. It was definitely not the place to find the religious purity of the chosen people. Yet Jesus started from there: not from the forecourt of the temple of Jerusalem, but from the opposite side of the country, from Galilee of the nations, from the border region. He started from a periphery.

Here there is a message for us: the word of salvation does not go looking for untouched, clean and safe places. Instead, it enters the complex and obscure places in our lives. Now, as then, God wants to visit the very places we think he will never go. Yet how often we are the ones who close the door, preferring to keep our confusion, our dark side and our duplicity hidden. We keep it locked up within, approaching the Lord with some rote prayers, wary lest his truth stir our hearts. And this is concealed hypocrisy. But as today’s Gospel tells us: “Jesus went about all Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity” (v. 23).

He passed through all of that varied and complex region. In the same way, he is not afraid to explore the terrain of our hearts and to enter the roughest and most difficult corners of our lives. He knows that his mercy alone can heal us, his presence alone can transform us and his word alone can renew us. So let us open the winding paths of our hearts – those paths we have inside us that we do not wish to see or that we hide – to him, who walked “the road by the sea”; let us welcome into our hearts his word, which is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Reflection and Sharing:

After the reading of the preceding text, share our thoughts on what is meaningful to us in this text. And why? And how?

3. Finally, to whom did Jesus begin to speak? The Gospel says that, “as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (Mt 4:18-19). The first people to be called were fishermen: not people carefully chosen for their abilities or devout people at prayer in the temple, but ordinary working people.

Let us think about what Jesus said to them: I will make you fishers of men. He was speaking to fishermen, using the language they understood. Their lives changed on the spot. He called them where they were and as they were, in order to make them sharers in his mission. “Immediately they left their nets and followed him” (v. 20). Why immediately? Simply because they felt drawn. They did not hurry off because they had received an order, but because they were drawn by love. To follow Jesus, mere good works are not enough; we have to listen daily to his call. He, who alone knows us and who loves us fully, leads us to put out into the deep of life. Just as he did with the disciples who heard him.

That is why we need his word: so that we can hear, amid the thousands of other words in our daily lives, that one word that speaks to us not about things, but about life.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us make room inside ourselves for the word of God! Each day, let us read a verse or two of the Bible. Let us begin with the Gospel: let us keep it open on our table, carry it in our pocket or bag, read it on our cell phones, and allow it to inspire us daily. We will discover that God is close to us, that he dispels our darkness and, with great love, leads our lives into deep waters.

Recall of the Rule and the General Constitutions

In 2018, we celebrated 40 years of our way of life, we now suggest doing a review together at this time, of article 4, 3rd paragraph from **Chapter II, the Way of Life**, as well as 8.2, and 9.2 of our General Constitutions that pertain to it. Take the time to read carefully the articles from the Rule, and those from the General Constitutions. Afterward, share your ideas on the content of these articles; take the necessary time.

Rule
Article 4

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people.

Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly.

Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel.

General Constitutions

Article 8.2

They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the SFO:

- *Rule 4* open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel";
- in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

Article 9.2

Rule 4 The Secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and its leaders should foster love for the word of the Gospel and help the brother and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit.

Life-Objective

In this month of February, during our fraternal meetings, let us search the biblical scriptures and then share our findings

Events and information from the Church and the Order

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

End of the meeting: (a song or a prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At home

Continue, during a time of silence and rest, the reading of the Gospel.