

Pastoral Letter for the Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time in 2019



Peter

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, AND FAVOUR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE, BISHOP OF WREXHAM

TO

THE CLERGY AND THE CONSECRATED AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

Health and Blessing in the Lord.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

'The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double edge sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow, it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing can hide from him, everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give an account of ourselves.'

(Hebrews 4:12)

With those dramatic words the author of the Letter to the Hebrew reminds us of the power and beauty of God's word "written" in the Bible, "spoken" and "revealed" in the Incarnation of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. It is he who dwells among us. No wonder, Pope Benedict XVI proclaims: "The church is built upon the word of God. She is born from and lives that word." (Verbum Domini N.3). Not only is the Church built upon the word of God; the life of each believer is sustained and nourished by that word both in personal prayer and devotion. It is in responding to the proclamation of God's word by the quality of our life and ultimately in union with Jesus Christ. It is in the holy communion

we make and receive during Mass that we are truly nourished as members of the Body of Christ.

The year 2020 marks the 1600th anniversary of the death of S. Jerome who translated the bible into the Vulgate, into Latin, which was the common language of the people. And also the 10th Anniversary of Pope Benedict's Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* which has been described at the most significant document of the Church on the Word of God since the Second Vatican Council. To mark these anniversaries, the Bishops of England and Wales have dedicated the year 2020 as a springboard 'Year of the Word.' We have chosen the theme, the title of the year as 'The God who speaks.' In the past Catholics have often been accused of neglecting the Scriptures. The three year cycle of the Lectionary which we hear during the Liturgy of the Word Sunday by Sunday has been a precious gift in the life of the Church as it nourishes the life and faith of its people. During this coming year, we are invited as a church and as individuals to engage afresh with the word of God especially through S. Matthew's Gospel. There are a number of ways of doing so.

1. CELEBRATING GOD'S WORD

We remember, "In the beginning was the word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (John 1:1) That same word was spoken to Moses and the People of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:10) and the prophets (cf. Nehemiah 8). The responses of the people in faith, forms the chronicle of the History of Salvation in response to God's Revelation. The Hebrew bible, which we call the Old Testament is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, the Messiah whom the prophets had foretold. At the beginning of his ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah when he said: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me ... This text is being fulfilled to-day even as you listen." (Luke 4:18, 21) The reading of the Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament give us privileged access to this revealed truth.

2. LIVING THE WORD

God's word is not just a chronicle of past events, it is "alive and active" (cf. Hebrews 4:12) and challenges us to respond in faith and action. It is one of the

primary sources of our relationship with God. "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10). Ultimately we listen to the promptings of God's Spirit in the silence of our hearts. "Heart speaks to heart" as Blessed John Henry Newman reflected. We look forward to his ceremony of canonisation by Pope Francis in October. Pope Benedict called us to a particular pastoral commitment that emphasizes the centrality of the word of God in the Church's life, and recommended a greater "biblical apostolate", not alongside other forms of pastoral work, *but as a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work.* (cf. *Verbum Domini* N.73) The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church is often described as our best kept secret; which bring us from living to -

3. SHARING THE WORD

God's word is not just for us individually, it needs to be shared with those among whom we live and work. Most obviously this is done through the care and example we offer among ourselves and others in the challenges of everyday living. Not merely caring for those who are poor in body, mind or spirit, but challenging the very structures which create such poverty and problems. The prophets of the Old Testament constantly condemn injustice and oppression.

4. As a Diocese

Each Diocese in England and Wales is uniquely placed to embrace 'The God Who Speaks' a Year of the Word. Each parish has an enormous resource of devoted and committed people who each in their own way, are able to share the Good News of the Gospel. During the coming liturgical year, the Church will listen to the Gospel of S. Matthew on Sundays, week-by-week. Additionally individual copies of the Gospel will be distributed to parishioners in order that they in turn, may share them with others as a gift.

Through the Year there will be events and activities to support and promote the reading, praying with, studying of and celebrating the Scriptures in the life of the Church, please check the LINK, Diocesan and God Who Speaks godwhospeaks.uk websites for more information.

5. Finally

On Advent Sunday, the 1st December in the Catholic Cathedral Churches of England and Wales each diocese will celebrate Evening Prayer (Vespers) of the Church inaugurating '2020 The God Who Speaks' a Year of the Word. I invite you to join me that afternoon in S.Mary's Cathedral, Wrexham for our Diocesan launch.

† Peter

Bishop of Wrexham

Given at Wrexham on the 26th September in the Year of our Lord 2019 and appointed to be read in the Churches and Chapels of the Diocese of Wrexham at all Masses of the Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time 2019, the beginning of the 1600th Anniversary year of the death of S. Jerome, and available in print form thereafter.