

**Homily for 01/22/2023 (Word of God Sunday)**  
**by Deacon Steve Pyle, St. Bonaventure Church, Davie, FL**

In 732 BC the Assyrian Empire invaded and annexed three districts of the northern kingdom of Israel. Then many non-Israelites were brought in to settle the land. This comprised the territory that had been historically assigned to the tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali and a portion of Galilee. These territories were headed for centuries of dark pagan rule and the tribes themselves of Zebulun and Naphtali disappeared long before the time of Jesus.

Isaiah seeks to give the people hope by proclaiming that change is coming. He envisions a future when the 12 tribes will once again be united under the rule of a single, glorious ruler from the Davidic dynasty. Darkness will be dispelled by light, sadness by joy, and foreign domination by liberation. Isaiah prophesied that the people of Galilee would see a great light. What is this light? It is Jesus, *the light of the world*.

We see this fulfilled in the Gospel reading. Jesus is in Galilee and the kingdom of heaven is at hand, but the people do not see it. They are still sitting in darkness and overshadowed by death. The kingdom of heaven is ready, but people are not. Jesus needs disciples to help him reveal himself as the light which heralds the arrival of the kingdom of God. So, he invites two sets of brothers to follow him. They in turn will teach others what they have learned from Jesus. In order to do so they will have to turn away from their known way of work, from their relatives and friends in order to enter a grander adventure. It is similar to the way of life they currently know but is much more fulfilling. Instead of dragging unwilling fish from the sea, they will be catching people by revealing that Jesus, Son of the Father, has come into the world. They themselves had already been caught, not by any actions of Jesus, but by his verbal command to follow him and they did so immediately.

You have probably heard the saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: *Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words*. It usually refers to the idea that it isn't necessary to actually speak out the Good News of God becoming man to save us and his enduring presence in our tabernacles. Instead, we can simply go about living our life in the best way possible so as to allow our light to shine before others. This will attract them to the Faith, convert them, and they will then desire to become Catholic. But this is not what Jesus did to attract his first disciples. He didn't perform praiseworthy deeds, he used words.

Yes, our actions can bear witness to the Gospel, but in a culture that is no longer overwhelmingly Christian that no longer can be assumed. Without words the motivation behind our actions can be misunderstood. There are many non-Christians out there who are also generous and charitable or who are models of how we should live. Some are even better at showing kindness or helping others out than many Christians. If you asked them what makes them different, they're not going to say that it's because they see Christ in their fellow man.

Jesus' final words to his apostles are those of the Great Commission: *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age*.

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Just as Jesus was sent by the Father to rescue us from sin and death, we are in turn sent by Jesus to rescue others who do not yet know of his power to save and lead us to heaven. Until Jesus comes at the end of time, his apostles, you and I and all of the baptized, are to proclaim the gospel and teach all that he has revealed.

For St. Paul, in today's reading there is a hierarchy of importance. He writes *Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel*. His preaching leads to belief, and then Baptism follows. Later he will write to Timothy: *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus ... preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching*. He does not say you don't have to speak about Jesus because actions speak louder than words.

In his letter to the Romans, he writes that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?*

Peter declared that we must be prepared to give an account of *the hope* by which we live, that is, our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. So, we have a job to do. We have to know and share the story of his saving work which is first predicted, then accomplished, and recorded in the Scriptures.

Christian tradition has always seen a close relationship between the pages of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. Both are called the Word of God because both shed light on what God is like, his plans for us, and how we should live in order to have a right relationship with Him. Again, Paul writes to Timothy *All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work*.

Therefore, in order to deepen our faith and have the knowledge to enable us to fulfill our commission to lead others to Christ, Pope Francis made the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time "Word of God Sunday." He wrote *the Bible is not a collection of history books or a chronicle, but is aimed entirely at the...salvation of the person*. Although Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, this Sunday's emphasis is on the written Word of God - the Bible, whose truths lead us to the Son of God and shows us the way to the Father.

So, by all means do not cease doing good works but speak also of why you do them when asked, or even when not asked. Study the Word of God so that you are equipped to bring the light of Christ to others who still live in darkness, who do not yet know him. The world needs you to preach the Gospel at all times in both what you say and do.