

## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Catholics have a reputation for not knowing the bible very well. We deserve some of the criticism. For years we did not even promote the use of a family bible at home as other Christians do. We encouraged hanging religious articles on the wall, wearing medals and crosses, and keeping prayer books at hand. But we probably did not promote the bible as well as we could have. To this day I still discover the occasional Catholic who does not even have a bible at home, much less use one for prayer.

On the other hand, at a typical Catholic Sunday mass, we hear without interruption three readings from the bible - four if you count the responsorial psalm. If you attend weekly for three years, you will hear all the major passages from the Old and New Testaments. We hear the scriptures without interruption so that we can sit at attention while God speaks to us. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, "When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel" (29). This is why at the end of the gospel, when the deacon says, "The gospel of the Lord," you do not say back, "Thank you, Deacon Jim." You don't talk to the deacon. Instead, you say "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." You address Christ because he has just addressed you in the uninterrupted proclamation of his gospel.

Pope Francis has designated this Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as the Sunday of the Word of God, devoted to its "celebration, study and dissemination." He chose this Sunday partly because it falls near the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and near the Day of Dialogue between Jews and Catholics. Since we all value the Word of God, this day becomes an opportunity to affirm points we all share in common. Here at the cathedral, we will honor the day with a blessing of readers. It is a poignant moment for us this year because of the death of two of our readers just this month: Elizabeth Boman and Eugene Gardner. Both of them loved the Word of God and loved to proclaim it to you.

Another reason why the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is fitting for this celebration is that each year this Sunday launches a series of readings from the same gospel. Matthew is the featured evangelist this year. Beginning today and going to the end of November, taking a break for the Presentation next week and on Sundays of Lent and Easter, we will hear in order the principal passages from Matthew about the life and teaching of Jesus.

In today's second reading we hear from Saint Paul a plea for unity, appropriate for us in the light of today's celebration. Paul opens his First Letter to the Corinthians scolding them for dividing into factions based on the personalities of the people who baptized them. Using himself as an example of how ridiculous this can be, he asks, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The obvious answer is no, Jesus was crucified for us; we are baptized in the name of Jesus. Jesus is our point of unity. He is God's word made flesh. Whenever we sense divisions with other believers or with members of our own family, we can remember this truth: Christ unites us. His word makes us one. We strengthen that unity when we pray every day and make use of the bible.

Sunday, January 26, 2020