

Homily - 7 February 2021
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Word of God Sunday (See *APERUIT ILLIS*)

Today is Word of God Sunday, and I begin this homily on the streets of Brisbane. That's because the Word of God was never meant to be shut up within the four walls of a Church building.

There are around 2.8 million people living in this diocese. About 700,000 of those identify as Catholics, but only around 60,000 will hear the word of God at Mass this Sunday. In his Apostolic Letter introducing Word of God Sunday, Pope Francis said that "devoting a specific Sunday...to the word of God can enable the Church to experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of his word and enables us to *proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world*". So on this Sunday, I will preach as always from the scriptures, but with a special invitation for you all to join me in proclaiming the riches of the word of God before the world.

St Paul speaks of the Good News that's more powerful than all the bad news, even the bad news of death. The Good News he speaks of isn't a message: it's not a 'word' in the usual sense. It's the Word made flesh who is a person, and the person is Jesus crucified and risen, present among us right now, even here on the steps of the Cathedral. He's wanting to be seen and heard. St Paul stresses his responsibility and duty to share the Good News, and with many others in the Church I feel the same sense of responsibility and duty. For all kinds of reasons, many have chosen not to join us in Church, but today we want to go out and offer the Word to everyone, the Good News which is all the Church really has – not to chide or condemn anyone, not to cajole or force, not just to get people to "sign up" to the organization because we need new members, but to share a gift with everyone, especially those who need it most.

We want to invite you to join in sharing the Good News of Jesus with everyone in the Archdiocese, especially perhaps those who have been baptized but no longer walk with us. We want to offer all Catholics the priceless gift that is their right as someone baptized into Jesus. We want to offer them the power to rise from their sick-bed like Peter's mother-in-law, to be free of all the evil powers that can hold us down. We want people to know the healing touch of Jesus in a Church which, as Pope Francis says, is a field-hospital.

We want everyone to know that they're welcome here. These seats are for you. This is holy ground, and it's holy because here in a special way we can see and hear the real, living Jesus. Here we can come to him together, come to him just as we are, with all our anxieties and ailments, all our wounds and weaknesses, all our quandaries and questions. We want you and everyone to know the joy of being a disciple – not perfect but, like all of us, a work in progress, on the road with others, following Jesus into the fullness of life. The journey of faith was never meant to be taken alone. It's hard work at times and pretty well impossible if we go it alone. That's not what Jesus wants for us; he doesn't ask us to do the impossible. He wants us to find sisters and brothers who travel with us, love us, support us, listen to us, advise us, even correct us if need be. That's what the Church is meant to be – not some huge, decrepit organization with ways that don't speak to my soul and rules that don't touch my life, but a pilgrim people journeying out of darkness into light – the light of Christ's mercy, compassion, forgiveness and healing.

On this Word of God Sunday we're making a call to all Catholics to encounter the Word of God in a new and deeper way. The call isn't harsh or heavy; it's more an invitation than any kind of command. We want to propose, not impose. If you're baptized Catholic, but feel estranged from the Church, this call is for you. Perhaps you have friends in the same situation: well, you could also invite them. This call comes not from us but *through* us – through us from Jesus himself. If it were just from me or from us, then forget it. But the call comes to you from Jesus. It's a call *from* him and *to* him. He calls you to himself – not for his own sake or for the Church's sake, but for your sake and the sake of the people whose lives you touch.

So join me in inviting anyone and everyone you know to listen to the Lord's voice which can be hard to hear with all the inner noise of our mind and heart and all the outer noise of a world full of loud voices, many of them promising life but delivering death.

Each parish and community has resources from Evangelisation Brisbane that will help anyone hearing these words to get involved. But there are three simple things you can do...

1. Sign up for the prayer outreach through the Evangelisation Brisbane website, something we can all do to support and encourage those responding to this call to go on this journey of faith.

2. Offer yourself as a volunteer to accompany those starting the journey by enrolling on the Evangelisation Brisbane website (we may need 10, 100 or a 1000 depending on the response we draw).
3. Be a welcoming presence in your community to ensure that new faces are greeted in a warm and friendly way, so that in finding you they will find Jesus.

My prayer is that, on this Word of God Sunday, the Holy Spirit will move in the life of every baptized Catholic, so that in the time ahead everyone will discover the deep meaning of their baptism and have their lives changed by the encounter with the Word of God himself, with Jesus crucified and risen.

Since the pandemic came upon us, I've been listening a fair bit to the music of Leonard Cohen who's long been a favorite of mine. His seems just the right voice for a time like this – sombre but truthful and in the end hopeful. In one of his songs, Cohen says, "There's a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in". There's also a crack in everyone, a crack in you and me. But that's how the light gets in – the light of Jesus which nothing and no-one can dispel. The call to you and to all whom you may know is a call from the light and to the light. Whatever the darkness may be, let the light in...then come, walk with us.

+ His Grace, Archbishop Mark Coleridge