

Word of God Sunday **(Third Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

Recently, Pope Francis issued a “*motu proprio*” [i.e. on his own initiative] proclaiming that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time be dedicated to the Word of God (Sacred Scripture).ⁱ He did this to further emphasize the importance the Word of God plays in our celebration of the January week dedicated to Christian Unity.

We know how much Scripture plays a fundamental role in three major religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. But, beyond that scripture scholars are beginning to see that there are traces of God’s Word even in other major religions in the world.

Many of us think of Scripture in the form of the written word, for that is the translation of the word “scripture.” But, historically what we know as Jewish scripture was **spoken** before it was ever written. It was only in about the 5th century BC that the Jews began to write down the sacred word on scrolls. Moreover down through centuries until modern times, most people learned of Scripture through the spoken word up until the 18th century when people more generally were able to read.

Fundamentally, this “Word” is pregnant with meaning and importance both to Christians and to Jews. In Jewish scripture, “word” has significant importance. In fact, to the Jews, “word” was fundamentally sacred, such that to them Word was actually God and God “doing.” If we recall Genesis, it was God who spoke and there was creation. Every time God spoke, something happened, something was created. In actuality, the very Hebrew word used to describe “God speaking” is “*dabar*” -- the Hebrew word for acting.

It is understandable then why John the evangelist would begin his gospel with these awesome words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” While John is describing the essence of Jesus, he is also saying something fundamental about Jesus. Jesus (the Word) is not just about speaking, he is about doing – his words spoken are not just about listening, but more importantly about doing.

So, on this third Sunday of Ordinary Time when we celebrate in a special way the Word of God, it is important for us to remember that this “scripture” is not just about reading or hearing, it is about “doing,” about “acting” about going beyond what we see in a bible or what we hear proclaimed on Sunday. We adherents to Scripture (the Word of God) are more than just a “hearing” people, we are fundamentally -- a “doing” people.

Deacon Bartholomew J. Merella, M.T.S.

ⁱ [Aperuit Illis, Papa Franciscus, 2019](#)