



**Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.**

Father Tim was ordained in 1986. Over the years Father Tim has served in parish ministry as both Assistant Pastor and Pastor. For a number of years, he worked full time in youth ministry. He has served his religious community as Vocation Director and as Vicar Provincial. He also served his religious community internationally as the Vicar General, residing in Rome for six years. Currently he serves as the Provincial Superior of the Ontario-Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection, and as Administrator of St. Agatha Parish, in St. Agatha, Ontario.

**THIRD SUNDAY IN THE LITURGICAL YEAR**

**January 23, 2022**

**GATHERING TIME**

*(10-15 Minutes)*

### **Introduction to the Word:**

My theology studies prior to ordination took place at the Toronto School of Theology, known simply as TST. It is part of the University of Toronto, and is a federation of various Christian denominations. This federation allows students to attend classes in any of the federated schools, drawing upon the vast array of scholars teaching at TST. Another benefit is to study with students from different denominations, to draw from a wide variety of experiences and different expressions of faith. In first year, all TST students have to attend the same introductory course to the Scriptures, affectionately known as “Baby Bible”. Each lecture had a different teacher addressing the area of scripture study that was their specialty – an amazing wealth of knowledge. Later in the week students would meet in smaller study groups to go over the lecture for that week – the groups were a mixture of students from different denominations.

I remember a number of significant things from “Baby Bible”. First, that while there was sometimes disagreement as to whether the Scriptures were written verbatim (especially concerning the words of Jesus), the interpretation in terms of how the Scriptures were to impact our lives was very similar from denomination to denomination. Second, how inspiring it was to have students share not simply their scholarly understanding of the scriptures, but also their understanding of Scripture flowing from their prayer life – the Scriptures are intended to be part of our prayer life. Third, and something that still impacts my life almost 40 years later, is what an intimate act it is to share what happens in one’s prayer life. To have students share what happened when they prayed on a particular passage of scriptures is an act of trust on their part, trusting that it is safe to share at such a deep level. Their example made it easier for me to share elements of my prayer life with others. Their example also stands as a reminder to me that prayer brings us face-to-face with God, thus bringing the Scriptures to

life. The lesson for me: the Scriptures are a living thing that brings breath to my life, transforming me every time I pray with God's Word.

**Warm-up Activity** (about 8-10 minutes):

*“He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:45). This is the message Pope Francis followed for the Apostolic Letter, *Aperuit illis*. Towards the end of this letter Pope Francis calls us to “practice mercy”. Francis points out that having listened to the Word a natural response on our part is to then practice mercy, for the Word has the power to open our eyes and lead us on a new path. Discuss how you hope God's Word might cause you to embark on a new path. What does that path look like? Where does it go?

**The Table of the Word**

**THEME: Sunday of the Word of God**

In an Apostolic Letter by Pope Francis, entitled *“Aperuit illis”*, he designated the Third Sunday in the liturgical year as the “Sunday of the Word of God” – to be celebrated annually. Fittingly this was announced on September 30, 2019 on the feast day of the great Scripture scholar St. Jerome. Jerome, who translated most of the Bible into Latin, was known for saying: *“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”*. Pope Francis said that *“Devoting a specific Sunday of the liturgical year to the Word of God can enable the Church to experience anew how the risen Lord opens for us the treasury of his word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world.”* Francis sought to highlight the place of the Scriptures in our life – its centrality in the Christian life. On this day we are called to do three things: one, celebrate the Scriptures; two, study the Scriptures; and three, be ambassadors of the dissemination of the Word of God.

**Penitential Rite:**

**Leader:** As members of Christ's Body, we seek the peace and reconciliation that makes us one.

For the times our actions have brought harm to others, **Lord, have mercy.**

For the times we have ignored our place in Christ's Body, **Christ, have mercy.**

For the times we have failed to notice Christ in our midst, **Lord, have mercy.**

**Let us pray** (together)

*On this day which is holy to you, O Lord our God,  
your people assemble to hear your words.*

*Let the Spirit that anointed Jesus send us forth  
to proclaim your freedom and favour.*

*This we seek through Christ our Lord, amen.*

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God, we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

### **FIRST READING** (Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10)

The priest Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the Law. The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

So the Levites read from the book, from the Law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law.

Then Ezra said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### **SECOND READING** (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27)

Brothers and sisters: Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### **GOSPEL** (Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21)

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to

write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom.

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Lectio Divina** means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So, take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

## **COMMENTARY:**

**Nehemiah.** The Book of Nehemiah contains stories that focus upon new beginnings, and in particular new beginnings that call for great rejoicing in the city of Jerusalem. The call to rejoice is based upon three factors: one, the time of exile has come to an end; two, the walls of Jerusalem have been rebuilt; and three, the city gates of Jerusalem have been re-hung. The People of God are now truly home, home where the Lord is present in the city and in the people themselves. It is at this point that today’s passage takes up the story. The time of celebration for the people of Jerusalem continues – this time with the presentation of the Book of Law, and its being read aloud to the people. The Book of Law is really a story of thanksgiving and celebration, identifying how the Lord has been present to the people. With the end of exile; with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem; with the hanging of the city gates; and with the proclamation from the Book of Law, the people are now on the path to healing, to a return to wholeness.

**First Corinthians.** This four-sentence passage from First Corinthians is fairly straightforward, requiring little explanation – not because it has little importance, but rather, because it is so very clear in its presentation. Jesus invites us to become a part of Him. If we believe, and do in fact become one with Christ, differences or separations among us will no longer exist. We will have become the “Body of Christ”, each of us endowed with different gifts and responsibilities for the good of the entire Body.

**Luke.** An interesting introduction in the opening paragraph of this passage from Luke. The Evangelist begins by inviting us to trust in what is written so that we too can understand the truth. We are informed that Luke's Gospel is just one narrative among many addressing the life and ministry of Jesus. Then the Evangelist makes an admission – he himself was not an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus, but he did investigate “everything carefully from the very first.”

We then hear the first words of the adult Jesus as he reads from the Prophet Isaiah, and then boldly proclaims the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah by describing his own messianic ministry – to “bring good news to the poor ... release to the captives ... sight to the blind, ... oppressed to go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” In many respects Jesus has described himself as a ‘front-line worker’, and in that role he is one who is charged with making tangible the manifestation of how God acts towards us.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:**

**Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10**      *“This day is holy to the Lord your God”*

Imagine the joy the people of Jerusalem must have been experiencing! The end of their exile has afforded them the possibility of not only returning home, but of rebuilding their great city, re-establishing themselves as a great nation, and clearly identifying themselves as the chosen of God. Is it any wonder that the people wept, not out of sadness, but rather out of pure joy? As mentioned above, the people of Jerusalem are on the pathway to wholeness; transformation has begun. Have you ever had an experience of this sort – a feeling of coming home, a return to wholeness and transformation? If so, how was your joy expressed? If not, can you relate in any way to the joy expressed by the people of Jerusalem?

**1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27**      *“Now you are the body of Christ”*

The reading reminds us that, by becoming one with Christ, all separations and differences will no longer exist. Clearly the world has not yet arrived at this point, but do you believe there is at least movement in that direction? Or on a smaller scale, is the church moving in that direction? Or on an even smaller scale yet, are you living your life in such a way that you are moving in that direction?

**Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21**      *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”*

Without question, Jesus makes some powerful statements in this passage. He speaks about how his ministry is focused upon transforming the world (His messianic ministry). Other than the examples Jesus gives in today's gospel of what His ministry will look like, in what other ways did Jesus strive to transform the world that are not mentioned here?

## **CARING-PRAYING TIME:** (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Today is the "Sunday of the Word of God" where we are invited to **celebrate** God's Word, **study** God's Word, and be **ambassadors** of God's Word (the very essence of 'Celebrating the Word'!). Today you have been celebrating and studying God's Word ... Now you are invited to go forth as ambassadors of God's Word. How might you be an ambassador of God's Word each day this coming week?

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

**Leader:** Baptized in the one Spirit into the one body, we pray for those who, with us, are members of Christ and for all the human family.

**For the church**, one in Christ yet richly diverse in its gifts and ministries: May all members care for one another, we pray to the Lord ...

**For those** who are bound by the grief of personal failure or past sinfulness: May the good news of God's reconciling love bring them freedom and peace, we pray to the Lord ...

**For the suffering** members of our families and faith communities: May the Lord's healing power come to them through our caring presence, we pray to the Lord ...

**On this Sunday** of the Word of God: Renew in each of us, Lord, a hunger to embrace your Word, we pray to the Lord ...

**For those members** of Christ's Body who have gone before us now in faith: May they know in God's kingdom the fulfillment of all that they believed on earth, we pray to the Lord ...

### **How can we help you in prayer this week?**

**Let us pray** (together)

*O God, you have sent Jesus among us as Prophet of your covenant  
and king of your anointing,  
the Messiah who proclaims to the poor  
the good news of your kingdom.  
Build us up into one body  
and make us instruments of liberation and salvation for all.  
We make this prayer through Jesus,  
who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,**

**OUR FATHER...**

**Celebrating the Word**, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** [www.resurrectionists.ca](http://www.resurrectionists.ca). **Email:** [provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca](mailto:provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca) The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).