

The Word of God: Embrace and Echo the Word

Over the next few days we will encounter the word of God in many ways, I want you to hear the voice of the word, to encounter its face, to be at home with the word and to walk with that word in your heart. That is what the bishops of the world did when they met in Synod last October, and so should we. One of the shocking aspects of our modern world is that we fail to open our ears to God's Word. We are trapped in a world where we only trust that which we can touch or prove by experiment. We are deluded into thinking that our salvation as a nation, as a society is totally in our own hands and as a consequence there is no room for our God and the Word he speaks. This is particularly hard for priest whose first responsibility is to preach the Word of God to those hungry for life. The liturgy of Holy Week allows the word live in us so that we echo its sound with our lives. So this year at this gathering of priests, the religious, the deacons and the people of our diocese I invite you to consider God's Word existing from eternity and resounding throughout all of history.

The Voice of the Word, the Word of God is revealed to us in different ways, since God chooses to communicate God's word in many and diverse ways (Hebrews 1:1). The bible expresses itself in a particular language, it holds the memory of events both hope-filled and tragic. Its pages resound with the voices and laughter of humanity as well as the pleas and tears of the poor and woven through all is the faithful love of God.

It is a word that sets a bow in the sky, - a word that is alive and active,
-a word that drops down from heaven and renews the earth,- word that is a lamp for my feet, light for my path. But it is also like fire, says the Lord - like a hammer shattering a rock. (Jer 23:29)

On the sixth day, God created us in His own image and likeness. God's signature is written on each one of us. Hildegard de Bingen reminds us of this signature when she writes, "When you see a human being walking down the street, you must say, Watch out, watch out, there goes a glistening glimmering image of God."

In fact the word of the Lord compels the prophet to speak even when he doesn't want to do so. Jeremiah says

I will not mention him, I will not speak in his name any more and then it becomes like a fire burning in my heart, I grow weary holding it in."(Jer 20:19)

The word must not become a useless burden that weighs us down. It is after all the promise for a few survivors, the remnant, the promise of the messiah,

Of course the trouble with words is that they can be impersonal, simply letters on a page, or vibrations in the air but for us that word is Christ among us - the fulfillment and incarnation of love. The Word has a face: Jesus

The ultimate and definitive high point of God's self-revelation is Jesus..Word made flesh. "When all was in quiet silence, the Almighty Word leaps down from heaven, He touches the sky yet trod the earth. The Word of God became flesh, walked this earth, and made visible the invisible."

This Word of God who became one of us which was raised from the dead and continues to live among us also dwells in our midst.

Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his, to the father through the features of men's and women's' faces(.G.M Hopkins)

With Christ came the revelation that God is essentially a God of Compassion, who enters into space and time ...and makes it possible to approach him directly asking as did the group of Greeks present in Jerusalem "We should like to see him" Jn 12:20-21. See the face of God in Jesus.. We encounter the face of Jesus, we can see him in the **House of the Word, the church,**

The place in our church, where we especially encounter of the Word, is the Liturgy. In the Eucharist, we are fed from two tables ...the table of the Body of Christ and the table of the Word.. We open up our hearts to receive the Word of God in the scriptures proclaimed. We acknowledge the presence of God in the assembly gathered and in the priest. We process as the Body of Christ to receive the Body of Christ bread and wine transformed into the very flesh of Christ. And we go forth as the Body of Christ to be Word and Blessing for our world.

The inspired Word of God-Sacred scripture - unites Jesus the word to the words of the prophets and apostle. But our faith is not only centered on a book, but on the history of salvation and on the person of Jesus Christ. ..the word of God made flesh.

We are invited in Holy Week to embrace and echo that word - Jesus.

The question is do we really embrace the word and allow it to change our hearts, our ways of relating and loving...our ways of teaching and preaching?

St. Amadeus, in the 12th century writes:

“Lord, we have heard Your Word, and we have been astounded. We have pondered Your marvels and we have fainted. As your Word descended, our hearts have been melted...You shed light in the darkness, dew upon dryness, and in the bitter frost, you kindled a raging fire.”

If only... Do we allow God to shed light in our darkness? Dew upon our dryness? And kindle in us a raging fire? Are we astounded by the Word of God?

Do we possess a Catholic Imagination that enables us to see “beyond experiences-events-people. That allows us to experience what is presented and then discover much more meaning than what first meets the eye..

Ronald Rolheiser puts it like this “A layered reality is part of the catholic imagination. To possess this imagination is to dwell in a universe inhabited by unseen presences-the presence of god, the presence of the saints, the presence of one another.”

We remember Samuel in his encounter with God’s voice. . God called out to Samuel, and Samuel was there...with an open heart...a readiness to hear. What holds us back from listening with the heart?

Have our hearts have grown dull and cold...hardened with life...no longer sponge-like. Or maybe our hearts are twisted, entangled, have lost the sense of truth about ourselves, about others, and about God. Or maybe our hearts are a few sizes too small.

The poet Jessica Powers in a poem... “This Beautiful Time” ...writes:

Oh, hear God within you speaking this infinite love,

Lifting the sky of the soul
With expanse of light
Shaping new heights and depths...

How are we to hear God, as Jessica suggests, speaking this infinite love and lifting the soul to new heights; we can gain clues from the prophet Ezekiel, who in the third chapter of his prophetic writings, calls us to eat the scroll and then go speak to the house of Israel. "O Mortal One,...feed your body and fill your stomach with the scroll I am giving to you. I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth."

What does it mean for us to eat the scroll...the word?

It means that if our teaching is to have wisdom/power, it must flow from a spirituality that has Christ at its centre, and committed to the Gospel...to echo Good News to a world in need of direction, meaning, beauty...a world in need of a morality that respects all of life, and of a love that enfolds and holds all of creation. It calls us let our lives be the voice of the Word.

We may ask, "What is the difference between one who has wisdom and knowledge and someone who is enlightened?" "The one who has wisdom and knowledge is the one who carries a candle in the darkness and lights the way. The one who is enlightened is the one who has become the Torch itself." So Let our Lives Speak.....become a Word...

And so we are invited to eat the word, a word that is sweet as honey even when it is challenging, painful and risky. It is in the savouring that the word becomes sweet. St. Anselm (11th century), calls us to taste the Word.

*Come now, turn aside for a while from your daily employment,
Escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts
Put aside your weighty cares, let your burdensome distractions wait,
Free yourself awhile for God and rest awhile in Him*

Conversion, enlightenment, pre-supposes a turning toward the sound, the truth, the wisdom inherent in the words. And so we acknowledge God's power at work in us.. "Glory be to God whose power work in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or ever imagine." (St Paul to the Ephesians)
Not only do we embrace the Word, but we are embraced by the Word...caught up in God's life... "the soul is in God, and God is in the soul"... (St. Catherine of Siena)...caught up in God's life...and that is what sends us forth to proclaim to a whole little world around us that is looking for life...Jesus is no longer dead...he is alive, and so we can proclaim resurrected Hope....we can echo the word... we can walk the Road of the Word: that is our mission

All kinds of human need confront us at every corner. All around us are the images of the crucified Jesus. The appalling events on our world remind us of the suffering of so many people day in day out in the different parts of the world where fear and, hunger and poverty, are the daily bread of the people.

Eli Wiesel, the Jewish writer who survived the death camps of the holocaust, tells a magnificent story of bread and sacrifice. Everyday the guards would give the prisoners their one meal of the day—one piece of bread and some soup. Wiesel remembers so vividly how his father would break off half of his bread each day and give it to his small son. This little bread kept Eli alive,

but his father grew weaker everyday and eventually died. Only later did Wiesel come to realize that his father, by sharing his bread, had hastened his own death.

It may be that by living the word we will hasten our own deaths - make no mistake about it that is the case in some parts of the world today. But if we are to have something to say to our own fearful world, then we have to show it that there is a path from fear to freedom, a path that puts the values of this world in their true place.

But first we open our ears to the Voice of the Word, then we will have a message to preach

We seek the Face of the Word ourselves so that we may invite others to encounter the person of Jesus

We make a home for that word in our hearts and our communities so that the Word of God may be nurtured within us,

and we walk the Way of the Word so that others may follow from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light from fear to freedom.