

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

January 26, 2020

Most Reverend John O. Barres

Homily

On September 30, 2019, the Feast of St. Jerome, Pope Francis announced that the universal Church would celebrate “Sunday of the Word of God” annually on the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time.¹

I celebrate for the first time with all of you and our Catholic Faith Network audience this “Sunday of the Word of God” and later today our Vicars and Auxiliary Bishops -- Bishop Andrzej Zglejszewski, Bishop Richard Henning, and Bishop Robert Coyle -- will be celebrating “Sunday of the Word of God” prayer services throughout Long Island.

The purpose of our “Sunday of the Word of God” celebrations this year and every year in the future will be to both forge and rekindle our desire to be deeply biblical Catholics on fire with the Word of God, the Eucharist and the mission of the Church.

In Matthew 4, Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee and calls two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John from their fishing nets. The Gospel narrative reads: “‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once, they left their nets and followed him.”

Each one of us have had this experience in every season of our lives of the Lord calling us with a depth of intimacy and affection to come after him so

¹ See Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *Aperuit Illis* issued “motu proprio” on September 30, 2019. It is available on the Vatican Website.

that we could be fishers of men on Long Island and in every Metro New York, national and global context the Holy Spirit puts us in.

We recognize that our capacity to be missionary disciples of the Lord (disciples who follow Jesus and missionaries who share Jesus) rests on us being on Fire with the Word of God.

I would like to make a few practical recommendations to help us celebrate for the first time “the Sunday of the Word of God.” [This homily will be posted on line for your reference and follow up.]

1) Carry a small copy of the New Testament everywhere we go. There is something about carrying the New Testament on our very person that illuminates how it is a light and lamp for our destinies and opens up the gates of holiness and mission in our lives.

2) Read, Study, Meditate, Pray, Contemplate and Live the inspired Sacred Scriptures.²

3) Read and pray Pope Benedict’s 2010 Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord* which sets our love for the Word of God in the beautiful mosaic of Catholic teaching concerning a Catholic theology of Revelation, the Liturgy and the Sacraments, the lives of the Saints, the Gospel of Life and Catholic Social Justice teaching. Let me give you a few samples of the illuminating inspiration you will find in *The Word of the Lord*:

> “The word of God makes us change our concept of realism: the realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things.” (#10)

> “Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God.” (#48)

> “The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist.” (#55)

Finally, on this first “Sunday of the Word of God”, I want to give thanks to God and celebrate with you the contributions of great Catholic biblical

² See Bishop Barres’ 2019 Lenten Letter in the March 2019 *Long Island Catholic* where he analyzes in detail Pope Benedict’s process of *lectio divina* described in *The Word of the Lord* (#86-87).

scholars who follow in the steps of the great Saint Jerome, the patron of biblical scholars.

In the United States, we give thanks for the contributions of Fr. Raymond Brown, Fr. Joseph Fitzmeyer, Fr. John Meier, Fr. Donald Senior, Fr. Frank Matera, Fr. Daniel Harrington, Fr. Francis Martin, Fr. Leiva-Merikakis, Dr. Scott Hahn, Dr. Mary Healy, Dr. John Bergsma and Dr. Brent Pitre and many, many others. As we complete our celebration of the week of Christian Unity, we also give thanks for the work of many fine Protestant biblical scholars and the ecumenical spirit in which they share and we share critical biblical research, advances and insights.

In the history our own Diocese of Rockville Centre established in 1957, we give thanks for the Catholic biblical scholarship of:

>Msgr. George Denzer who contributed an article on the Pastoral Letters of Saint Paul in the first *Jerome Biblical Commentary* published in 1968

>Emeritus Auxiliary Bishop Emil Wcela, SSL, Immaculate Conception seminary (Huntington) rector and professor of biblical theology who published many insightful books on the Sacred Scriptures including *Paul the Theologian* and *Paul the Pastor* (both published by the Pueblo publishing company) and who continues to light up the East End of Long Island with his inspiring Bible studies

>Seminary professors of biblical theology Msgr. Robert Hayden and Fr. William Slater

>Auxiliary Bishop Richard Henning and his groundbreaking use of contemporary narrative biblical theology in his 2007 Angelicum University dissertation entitled '*Teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ: The Christological Content of the Speeches of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles*

>Dr. Kathy Hayes who has taught at our seminary with such fine dedication for many years

>Fr. Rene Tapel, the pastor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga parish in Great Neck, and his fine 2002 doctoral dissertation at Pamplona University in Spain entitled *Joy and Sorrow in the Gospel of Saint John*

Please join me in showing our appreciation on this first “Sunday of the Word of God” for the contributions of these great Catholic biblical scholars to the mission of the Catholic Church!

May the Word of God continue to be the light and lamp for our steps on this earth, steps that lead us to Heaven and Eternal Life with God in Heaven.

Finally, I would like to celebrate with all of you this morning some news we received from the Holy See this past Thursday – that former Auxiliary Bishop of Rockville Centre and now former Bishop of the Diocese of Cleveland Ohio, Archbishop Nelson Perez, was named the new Archbishop of Philadelphia. His Installation is scheduled for Tuesday, February 18th.

Archbishop Perez’s deep spiritual life and creativity in evangelization, his national leadership in the 5th Encuentro and his rich roots in the Catholic Church of Philadelphia will result, with the intercession of St. John Neumann and St. Katherine Drexel, in a new and compelling era of bold evangelization in the “City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection.”

The Diocese of Rockville Centre and all of Long Island remembers Archbishop Perez’s “Joy of the Gospel”, his contagious sense of humor and his pastoral spirit with great fondness and with great pride as we celebrate this historic moment in the history of the Church in the United States.

My favorite description of Archbishop Perez’s many gifts and charisms comes from Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore. The day after Bishop Richard Henning’s ordination and installation as Auxiliary Bishop in July 2018, Archbishop Lori and then Bishop Perez were having breakfast in the Cathedral rectory.

Later that day, Bishop Murphy, Archbishop Lori and I went out to lunch and Archbishop Lori said to Bishop Murphy and I: “Having breakfast with Nelson Perez is like opening a bottle of champagne!”

Please join me in thanking the Holy Spirit and the Holy See for this beautiful appointment of Archbishop Nelson Perez as the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

