

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C 'THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD'

This **'Sunday of the Word of God'** has been observed since 2020 in the Roman Catholic Church. On 30 Sept 2019, Pope Francis's [apostolic letter](#) 'Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God' (entitled *Apparuit illis*) confirmed that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time each year was to be *'devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the Word of God'*. The letter opens with the words *'Aperuit illis'* from Luke 24: 45: 'He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures'. For us, too, this Sunday *'helps us 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'*.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12: 12–30

From the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time to the beginning of Lent, we read Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded the church in Corinth and lived there for about 18 months in 49-51 AD. He wrote his letter from Ephesus (now in Turkey), probably in 57 AD.

Here Paul answers two letters he has received concerning lack of harmony and internal strife in the Corinthian church. In last week's passage (12: 4–11), Paul focuses on the spiritual gifts that some Corinthians were using as a way of claiming leadership above others, and this was a cause of dissension. This week, Paul uses his extended metaphor of the body and its different parts. All parts of the body need each other, and must work together for the welfare of the whole.

Paul addresses all Corinthian Christians: 'You (plural form) are the body of Christ'. We can also apply his words to our own 21st-century Church, seeing it as the embodiment of Christ in the world. Beyond the different peoples and cultures there is a unity: we all believe in Christ. We are part of this one body.

Paul expresses the same idea more succinctly in his letter to the Romans: *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* (Romans 12: 4-5)

Gospel Luke 1: 1–4, 4: 14–21: Jesus teaches in the synagogue

The Gospel passage also reflects the theme of this Sunday of the Word of God.

'Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative ...'

Writing the best Greek in the New Testament, Luke formally introduces us both to his Gospel (in his Preface) and to the start of Jesus's public ministry.

In his carefully researched account of Jesus's life, he builds on the 'well- founded teaching' of eyewitnesses and reminds us of the vital importance of Scripture, the words of which are being fulfilled as we 'listen'.

'An orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus'

Luke has written his Gospel for 'Theophilus', meaning 'Lover of God': effectively he is addressing each one of us today. Luke also refers to Theophilus as 'excellent': a title given to high officials in the Roman Government.

Jesus, in the power of the Spirit ... taught in their synagogues

Jesus, prompted by the Holy Spirit, had returned to Galilee. The synagogue was the centre of religious life. There was only one Temple, but according to the Law there had to be one synagogue for every ten families. Jesus was used to teaching in synagogues, and therefore familiar with the Sabbath service, which had its origins in the long history of the Jews. This usually consisted of prayers, readings, and teaching by way of a homily. The book to be read and commented on was determined by the season, but the preacher could choose the passage.

He stood up to read and the scroll ... was given to him



James Tissot: Jesus teaching in the synagogue

As was the custom, Jesus stood to read and sat down to deliver his homily. He was already highly thought of, and at that time the ruler of a synagogue would invite a distinguished Jewish adult male to read the scripture of the day and deliver a homily on it.

This period in Jesus's ministry has been called the 'Galilean springtime', since opposition to his teachings had yet to become apparent. On this occasion, Jesus combines chapters 61: 1ff and 58: 6 from the prophet Isaiah. These words were originally addressed to the Jews as they looked forward to the rebuilding of their nation.

'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing ...'

Luke uses the word *today* at several times of great importance: for example, the annunciation to the shepherds, the story of Zacchaeus, and the thief who recognised Jesus on the cross.