

# Pope Francis

## APERUIT ILLIS

Apostolic Letter Instituting the  
*Sunday of the Word of God*

Commentary of the  
Most Rev. Rino Fisichella



CATHOLIC BOOK PUBLISHING CORP.  
New Jersey

2. At the conclusion of the *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, I proposed setting aside “a Sunday given over entirely to the Word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people” (*Misericordia et misera*, 7). 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 up for us the treasury of His Word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world. Here, we are reminded of the teaching of Saint Ephrem: “Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has colored his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that

each of us may find a richness in what he or she contemplates” (*Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 1, 18).

With this Letter, I wish to respond to the many requests I have received from the People of God that the entire Church celebrate, in unity of purpose, a *Sunday of the Word of God*. It is now common for the Christian community to set aside moments to reflect on the great importance of the Word of God for everyday living. The various local Churches have undertaken a wealth of initiatives to make the Sacred Scripture more accessible to believers, to increase their gratitude for so great a gift, and to help them to strive daily to embody and bear witness to its teachings.

The Second Vatican Council gave great impulse to the rediscovery of the Word of God, thanks to its Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, a document that deserves to be read and appropriated ever anew. The Constitution clearly expounds the nature of Sacred Scripture,

its transmission from generation to generation (Chapter II), its divine inspiration (Chapter III) embracing the Old and New Testaments (Chapters IV and V), and the importance of Scripture for the life of the Church (Chapter VI). To advance this teaching, Pope Benedict XVI convoked an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” and then issued the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, whose teaching remains fundamental for our communities.<sup>1</sup> That document emphasizes in particular the performative character of the Word of God, especially in the context of the liturgy, in which its distinctively sacramental character comes to the fore.<sup>2</sup>

It is fitting, then, that the life of our people be constantly marked by this decisive relationship with the living Word that the Lord never tires of speaking to His Bride, that she may grow in love and faithful witness.

As noted, there is a bond and a harmony demonstrating the importance of God's Word that, under the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit and in the consistent interpretation of Pastors, perdures as a living Word, transmitted from generation to generation to offer to all an answer to the question of meaning that envelops personal existence. Therefore, increasingly the Bible is coming back into the hands of believers to be their food and nourishment. Within this horizon, not to be missed is the connection that Pope Francis, taking up *Dei Verbum*, makes between Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist: "Regular reading of Sacred Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist make it possible for us to see ourselves as part of one another. As Christians, we are a single people, making our pilgrim way through history, sustained by the Lord, present in our midst, Who speaks to us and nourishes us. A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but

rather a year-long event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the Risen Lord, Who continues to speak His Word and to break bread in the community of believers” (n. 8).

In light of these considerations, we run no risk comparing the establishment of this *Sunday of the Word of God* to the *Sunday of Corpus Christi*, in which are celebrated solemnly the Body and Blood of Christ. The latter feast emerged in the West somehow as an answer to the errors formulated by Berengar of Tours who questioned the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated bread. In 1264, following the miracle of Orvieto, Pope Urban VI, by means of the Bull *Transiturus*, made this feast available to the whole Church. Thomas Aquinas, adopting the ancient text of Venantius Fortunatus (530-607), composed the *Pange lingua*, which remains until our days the foremost Eucharistic hymn. The establishment of the *Sunday of the*