

# Ralph Bishop of Hallam Pastoral Letter

**To be read at all Masses on the weekend of 28/29 September 2019  
For the Year of the Word 2019/2020**

*"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ"* (St Jerome)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tomorrow (Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September) Cardinal Nichols will launch the Year of the Word, under the title "God who speaks". This is an initiative of the Bishops of England and Wales, to promote a deeper understanding of the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures to help us all to come to a more loving, more personal relationship with Christ who is God's living Word among us (Jn. 1,1-18).

Tomorrow is the Feast of St Jerome (347-420)) whose translation of the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible into Latin, known as the Vulgate – 'for the common people', was the bed-rock of the Western Church's knowledge of the sacred texts for many centuries. Sadly, as fewer people knew Latin the sacred Word became a closed book. The Second Vatican Council emphasised the need to renew interest in the Scriptures (DV Chapter 6)<sup>1</sup>; but for many the Bible remains a strange and scary work, that seems to have little relevance in our daily lives.

St Jerome eloquently stated that 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'. The reverse is also true: the more we know about the Scriptures the more we know Christ. In the sacred texts of the Jewish people which Jesus knew well and which we share with them, as in the books that form what we call the New Testament, we encounter Jesus. Guided by the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Church we are led to a deeper relationship with the Lord.

Throughout this Year of the Word, which begins in earnest on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the liturgical year, there will be many opportunities to grow in knowledge and understanding of the Bible. The key themes of the year are: celebrating, living and sharing God's Word.

Much is already happening in our parishes with bible study groups, prayer groups, some pursuing *lectio divina* or other ways of engaging with the Scriptures. Our adult formation team provides regular opportunities for biblical study around the diocese. Let us aim to have in every parish a group devoted to reflecting on God's Word. No Mass should be celebrated without the Word being opened in a brief homily. (see Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini Part 2- The Importance of the Homily*<sup>2</sup>)

Today's readings call us to act on behalf of the poor. Amos is known as the prophet of social justice. In the first reading he berates the wealthy who care only for themselves, as does the rich man in Jesus' parable, who eats sumptuously every day while the poor man is eaten by the street dogs. One dresses in expensive purple, the other is purple with bruises, Lazarus' name which means 'God helps', is known to the anonymous rich man and is known to God who delivers Lazarus to Paradise. We are very generous in helping the poor, at home and overseas. For this I thank you. This clearly shows our love for our neighbour which is one of the hinges on which swings the Greatest Commandment. The other is love of God whom we encounter in the Word.

Notice in the Gospel-passage Abraham emphasises the need to know Moses and the prophets, shorthand for the Scriptures. There we see our hope for life with Christ in the Resurrection.

Christ is really present in His Word, opened and shared, as He is really present in the Eucharist, broken, poured and shared. We must revere the Word as we do the Blessed Sacrament (DV.#21).

Dedicate yourselves to spending some time each day with the Lord in His Word, and take some of the opportunities offered in this Year of the Word.

Finally, I ask that of all of us who celebrate and try to live God's Word also share it – with each other and with those around us. I pray that this Year of the Word will be a chance for all of us to enter into a conversation with the God Who Speaks.

Yours sincerely in Christ, the Redeemer,

+ Ralph

<sup>1</sup> *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II

<sup>2</sup> *Verbum Domini, The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. Pope Benedict XVI, Alive Publishing, Stoke on Trent, 2010, 95.