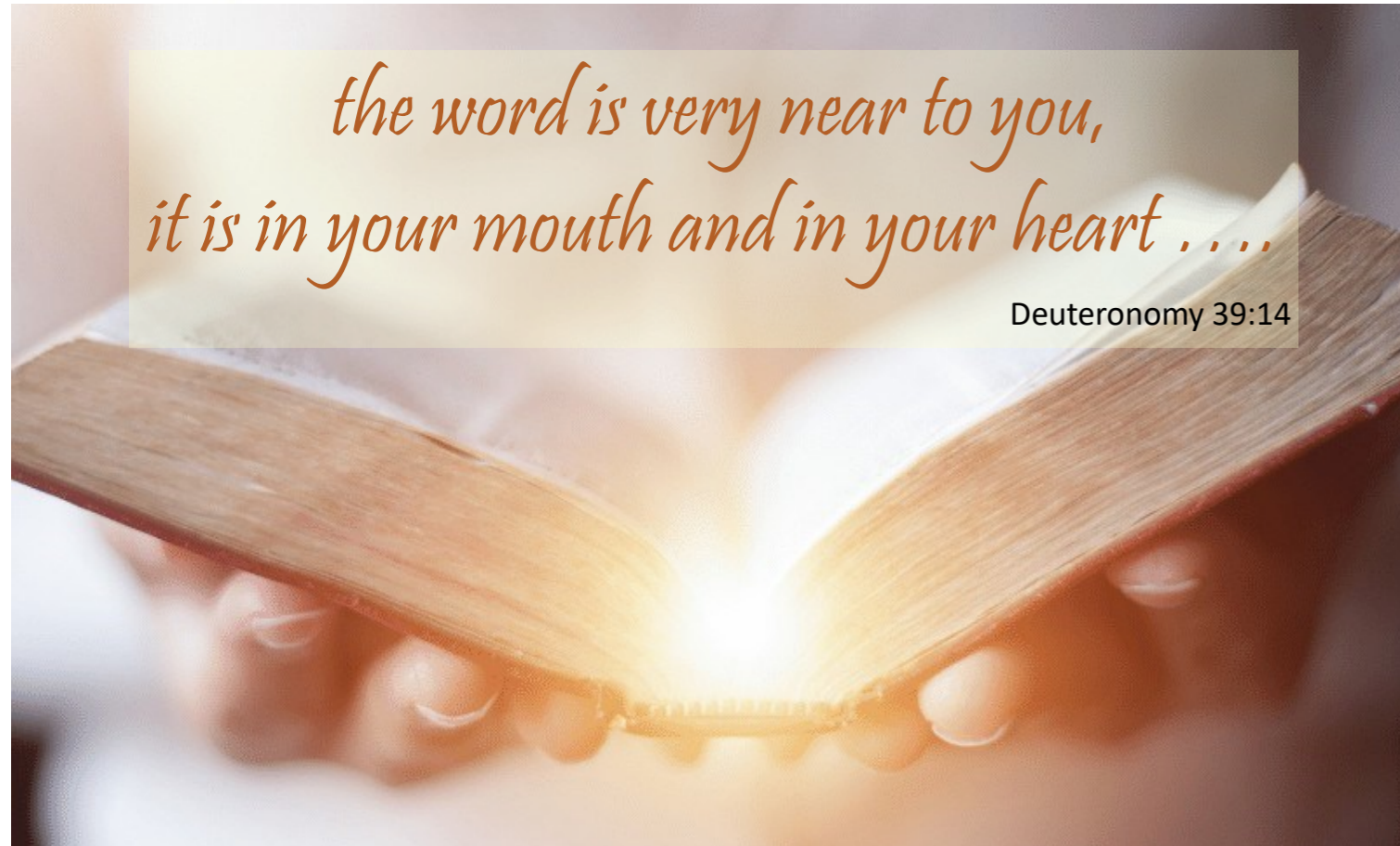


*the word is very near to you,
it is in your mouth and in your heart*

Deuteronomy 39:14



CENTRALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

In October this year it will be 60 years since the first session of the Second Vatican Council began. If you have only known the Church of the Second Vatican Council, it may be difficult to imagine a time when most Catholics had a family bible but didn't read it and were not really encouraged to do so; a Sunday liturgy where the Gospel was proclaimed first in Latin, and sometimes followed with a reading in English. There may have been a sermon but not a homily to break open the word of God. We have come a long way.

The Vatican II document on revelation *Dei Verbum* (Word of God) began in 1962 and was not promulgated until November 1965. It heralded a wonderful breakthrough and a dramatic shift from using the bible to support theological conclusions to seeing it as primary witness of God's revelation and as an encounter with God in friendship. *By this revelation, then, the invisible God, from the fullness*

of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them. (DV 2)

The Vatican II constitutions on liturgy and revelation restored the centrality of the Word of God to Catholic life and worship. In an address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 2013, Pope Francis said: *Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.* The Bible holds the inspired testimony to the living Word of God, Jesus.

SCRIPTURAL IMAGES OF CHURCH

From the source of Scripture in Vatican II, a different emphasis on Church emerged with three images of Church in particular: the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The image of the People of God connects our identity with the original chosen Hebrew people of God and with our baptismal relationship as sisters and brothers in Christ. Processes of wide consultation and collaboration flow from this image of Church.

HOW SWEET ARE YOUR WORDS ...

In his homily for this year's Sunday of the Word of God, Pope Francis said:

Everything started with the word that God spoke to us. In Christ, his eternal Word, the Father 'chose us before the foundation of the world' (*Eph 1:4*). By that Word, he created the universe: 'he spoke and it came to be' (*Ps 33:9*). From of old, he spoke to us through the prophets (*cf Heb 1:1*) and finally, in the fullness of time (*cf Gal 4:4*) he sent us that same Word, his only begotten Son... the word of God is no longer a promise, but is now fulfilled in Jesus.

Fr Ron Rolheiser points out that *the word of God is not a baton, passed on in a relay race ... the word of God is something to be eaten, digested and given flesh. Our normal response to the word of God should be like Jeremiah's response in Jer 13:16*

Your words were found and I ate them, and your word became to me the gladness and joy of my heart.

There are a number of scripture passages about eating and digesting the word of God. Jewish rabbis write about chewing the word of God, in other words, patiently reflecting on it, coming back to familiar passages, so that the word of God becomes part of us; hearing and absorbing the word of God into ourselves before we speak it to others in formation, teaching and preaching.

*How sweet are your words to my taste;
Sweeter than honey to my mouth*

Psalms 119:103



This Sunday is the third celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God. Pope Francis instituted this Sunday in 2019 with a document that begins with an extract from Luke's account of the journey to Emmaus. **He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures** Lk 24-45. Setting the disciples hearts on fire by breaking open the Jewish Scriptures to them was one of the final acts of the risen Jesus before his Ascension. The logo (*above*) illustrates this scene from Luke's Gospel.

In Australia, the Sunday of the Word of God is celebrated on the first Sunday in February so that it is not lost in the last weeks of January. In other places it is celebrated on the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time.

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD IN ROME

Pope Francis celebrated the Mass for this Sunday on 23rd January. During the Mass he installed six women and two men in the ministry of Lector. Three women and five men were also installed in the ministry of Catechist.

Women and men have served for a long time as readers and catechists and have often received a blessing to carry out these ministries. The installation to the ministry of Lector has previously been reserved to men preparing for the priesthood and the permanent diaconate.

At the conclusion of the Synod on the Word of God in 2008, one of the majority votes was to install lay women as lectors. A revised ritual for this will be translated from Latin and distributed throughout the world. Guidelines and a ritual for the newly established ministry of Catechist will also become available.

VOCATIONS TO MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

In his homily, Pope Francis emphasized the vocational call to the ministries of lector and catechist as being *called to the important work of serving the Gospel of Jesus, of proclaiming him, so that his consolation, his joy and his liberation can reach everyone.*

Discernment and formation will become necessary parts of preparation for installation into the ministries of Lector and Catechist.

MINISTRY OF CATECHISTS

In Australia, the ministry of Catechist is usually associated with the ministry to students in state schools. A new *Directory of Catechesis* was launched in 2020 that describes a much broader ministry of faith formation for men and women of all ages.

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