



GENERAL PREFECTURE OF BIBLICAL MINISTRY AND COMMUNICATION

January 4, 2023

Dear Brothers,

CELEBRATING THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD 2023

Greetings to you all from the General Curia in Rome. May the grace and peace of the Lord be with you all as we begin this New Year 2023.

I write on the above subject matter and wish to present a proposal to you all on how we could celebrate this year's Sunday of the Word of God which comes up on January 22, 2023.

Last year, our celebration was centered on the enthronement of the Bible and the *lectio divina* that was also proposed to our communities. Many of you sent pictures and videos of the celebration from different parts of the Congregation and pastoral ministries. This has been shared with the entire congregation using our different means of communication. We appreciate the active participation of all of us in this celebration.

This year, I will like to propose another theme for our reflection on the celebration of this Sunday of the Word of God. The theme of homily and its preparation. First of all, Pope Francis affirmed that "... various communities will find their own ways to mark this *Sunday* with a certain solemnity. It is important, however, that in the Eucharistic celebration, the sacred text be enthroned, in order to focus the attention of the assembly on the normative value of God's word. On this Sunday, it would be particularly appropriate to highlight the proclamation of the word of the Lord and to emphasize in the homily the honour that it is due." (AI 3)¹. On the basis of finding our way of celebrating this Sunday, I wish to propose the following to us:

1. We continue with the communal enthronement of the word of God and especially where this is possible during the celebration of the Eucharist this Sunday in the Pastoral position or our communities (formation houses, education centres², etc).
2. Emphasis on the centrality of the homily in the celebration of this year's Sunday.

The first proposal is what we already know. Therefore, it may not be very necessary to dwell so much on this. I would like to invite us to spend a little more time reflecting on the second proposal- the centrality of the homily, or if you like the proclamation of the word in the celebration of this year's Sunday of the Word of God.

As missionaries, we listen to the word and reflect on it after which we proclaim it to others. This act of proclamation which stems from our attentive listening and meditation becomes the foundation of the proclamation that we make. Thus, it is an essential part of our being missionary servants of the Word. We, therefore, take this process as a way of life and our responsibility toward others.

¹ The Apostolic Letter in the form of a motu proprio "Aperuit Illis", the Pope instituted the Sunday of the Word of God on September 30, 2019.

² Where this is possible and it is allowed. I am aware of the different contexts and the religious sensitivities of the different countries where we are present.

In the preparatory phase of homily, which has a “quasi sacramental character” (EG 142), especially with reference to heart-to-heart communication during its delivery, a prolonged time of study, prayer, and reflection is necessary as the Pontiff enunciates in EG 145. These aforementioned activities on a personal level reveal the importance of the personal preparation of the preacher which our Constitutions n. 34 speaks about. What would these activities in practical terms mean for us these days? And how can we realize them? My mind turns to the tradition of deep study and reflection that takes us into the spirit that inspired the biblical author to write the word of God. It is the same Spirit that we work in consonance with when adequate time is given to these study, prayer, and reflection. Therefore, the invocation of this Spirit, openness to its inspiration, courage and attentive listening to its voice in study prayer and reflection will be important for this preparatory phase of the homily. However, as the pontiff rightly noted, a frequent and probably valid excuse that is given is the lack of time for these exercises. However, an audacious proposal, from my perspective, was made by the Pope when he says: “**I presume to ask that each week a sufficient portion of personal and community time be dedicated to this task (preparation of homily), even if less time has to be given to other important activities.**” EG 145.

What is our reaction to this? I thought that the essence of such a proposal is for us to realize the priority of place that the proclamation of the word during homilies has in our lives. Some of our communities have the habit of weekly sharing the Word of God in the form of *lectio divina*. There are also many other communities in different places where this is not practiced and this would be a challenge for them because it has not been practiced even after some repeated suggestions and recommendations. May I encourage such communities to take up this audacious proposal. When we implement this suggestion, we will be more rooted in Christ who speaks to us in and through the word of God that we read and meditate upon as a religious community.

Our study will help us to deepen our knowledge of the mystery of God that is revealed through the word that is read, our prayers will keep us in communion with the same Spirit that inspired the sacred authors and our reflection will help us to personalize as well as contextualize the text that it read. Thus, we will in communion with the same Spirit that inspired every writing (2 Tim 3,16), be able to communicate the mystery of God to which we have been called to be ministers.

The XXVI general chapter places an important emphasis on the homilies within the context of our living out our charismatic call as servants of the Word. Thus, we committed ourselves to: “Take the preparation and delivery of homilies very seriously, according to the guidelines of the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. EG 135-159).” QC 55. This affirmation does not only place a high premium on the preparation and delivery of homilies but it goes further to indicate important material that would be of help in the preparation and delivery of homilies namely: *Evangelii Gaudium* 135-159³. ***On this basis, I would like to propose that we take time to read and reflect on the text as proposed to us.*** This can be done on two levels, the individual reflective level and the community level with some time to share the personal reflection. May we schedule the best time for the community sharing of the reflection. The essence of this exercise is to be able to put into practice those guidelines and suggestions therein for our ministry of the Word especially the preparation and delivery of homilies.

The second part of this process is the actual proclamation or delivery of the prepared homily. There is no gainsaying that the whole effort put into the preparation of a homily can be rewarded or ruined through the delivery of the same. It is on this basis that I would like to reiterate what you probably know already about the delivery of homilies, namely; the true knowledge of the audience and to put them into consideration right from the time of the preparation. The contextualization of the delivery of the homily cannot be over-emphasised as

³ I have attached these numbers to this letter in order to help our further readings and reflection.

this encapsulates every other thing that would or could be said about the delivery of the homily, from language⁴ use to time⁵ dedicated to the delivery of the homily.

An important area of emphasis in the delivery of the homily which we can reflect on as a community given our current situation is how to reach those who are not physically present in the four walls of our Churches. This is where the different means of communication we have at our disposal would be helpful. We will be able to reach out to different people in different places and different continents including the digital continent when we avail ourselves of these means. It is on this basis that I will like to recall the words of Benedict XVI thus: “It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this "digital continent". Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm.”⁶ It is our hope that our commitment to form and consolidate the “cybermissionaries” will help us to achieve this.

Finally, I wish to encourage you all to continue the formation of the lay faithful especially the catechists in their ministry of the word. This is taking a central position in our service to the people of God. It should be remembered that the multiplication of evangelizers through the right formation that we give enhances our mission of evangelization. However, we should also take care of our own ongoing formation to be effective in the ministry. Thus, we continue to deepen our intimacy with the Word of God so as to be transformed and then become instruments of the transformation of our world.

Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you all a happy celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God 2023!!!

Fraternally yours,



Henry Omonisaye, CMF
General Prefect of Bible Ministry and Communication

⁴ Our Founder in his many preaching used simple language and that of the people in order to bring the Word to their doorsteps.

⁵ The time spent in the delivery of homilies is very culture laden. It will be good to bear the recommendation of Pope Francis in mind. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the Word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than 10 minutes, please. (Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday 7 February 2018).

⁶ Message of Benedict XVI for the 43rd world communications day, Sunday, May 24, 2009.