

**BIBLE SUNDAY 2015:
INTRODUCTORY LETTER**
DEPARTMENT FOR EVANGELISATION AND CATECHESIS,
CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Dear Friends,

On the second Sunday of Advent – **6th December 2015** - parishes in England and Wales are invited to celebrate Catholic Bible Sunday. This year's theme is '**Embracing the Gospel of Mercy**'.

Catholic Bible Sunday provides an opportunity for everyone to give thanks for the gift of the Bible, and also invites a deepening of understanding of its message.

The celebration of the Sunday, this year, comes just days before Pope Francis will open the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The Pope desires that the Year "will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!" He hopes that, "the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!" (Bull of Indiction 5)

An important way in which believers and non-believers alike encounter the 'balm of mercy' is through the Bible stories and texts. It is therefore hoped that on Catholic Bible Sunday this year two things will be invited and encouraged:

- To read the Gospel of Luke, also known as the 'Gospel of Mercy'.
- Once someone has read the Gospel, that they gift it to someone else who perhaps isn't a Christian.

Some easy-to-use materials have been provided below to assist the celebration of the Sunday. Please do use them and consider how you, your parish and family, might give thanks for and share, in a new way, the gift of God's Word in your life every day.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter Brignall

Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

For additional resources in support of Catholic Bible Sunday please see: www.thewordofthelord.co.uk

Catholic Bible Sunday resources are offered by the Scripture Working Group, which is an instrument of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The work of the Group is supported by the Bible Society.

**CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER 2015:
MASS READINGS
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

First Reading: Bar 5:1-9

God means to show your splendour to every nation.

Baruch describes the peace and glory of Jerusalem when the exiles return from Babylon. As they cross the desert every mountain will be flattened, every valley filled in. John the Baptist alludes to this in his message that the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

Psalm: Ps 125:1-2a, 2b-3, 4-5, 6

What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad.

Second Reading: Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Paul writes to his favourite community at Philippi that the best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is to increase their love for one another. Then they will be in a fit state to celebrate the great Day of Christ.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 3: 4, 6

Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

All mankind shall see the salvation of God

The Baptist is preparing a community ready for the coming of the Messiah. The essential condition is repentance, not just weeping that we are sinners, but a change of direction, taking on a new system of values, the values of God.

CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY 2015: HOMILY NOTES

Second Sunday of Advent - 6 December 2015

The Year of Mercy

Bible Sunday this year falls two days before the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. On that day begins the Jubilee Year dedicated by Pope Francis to the mercy of God, which will run till the Feast of Christ the King at the end of November, 2016. In his choosing to emphasise mercy, Pope Francis follows in the footsteps of Pope St John Paul II, whose second encyclical letter spoke about God's mercy (*Dives in misericordia*). St John Paul II also decided that the Sunday after Easter Sunday should be given the title 'Divine Mercy Sunday'.

The opening of this Year also coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the completion and closing of the Second Vatican Council, one of whose significant achievements was a renewed emphasis on the Bible in the Church, expressed especially in the issuing of a new three-year Lectionary. Clearly the Father's mercy is an appropriate subject for our reflections on this Bible Sunday.

The Mercy of God in the Old Testament

The coincidence of the opening of the Jubilee Year with the Feast of the Immaculate Conception immediately sets up a connection with the first chapters of the Bible, the story of the Fall. Man and woman, made in the image of God, are also fallen creatures, always prone to fall again, so in need of divine mercy. But this mercy is promised in the story itself, that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. The mercy of God in redemption is built into the constitution of the world, and Mary is the Second Eve, conceived without sin at the origin of salvation, just as the first Eve is the archetype of human failure.

The Name of God, too intimate and too awesome to be pronounced, is revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush as a sign of friendship and protection, but its meaning is revealed only when Israel has again fallen by worshipping the golden calf, a symbol of all idolatry. God then passes before Moses crying out, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in mercy and faithfulness' (Exodus 34.6). This is the name of God which echoes down the scriptures. It comes in the Book of Jonah, when Jonah, in his frustrated fury at the non-destruction of Nineveh, cries out, 'I knew that you are a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in mercy' (Jonah 4.2).

The Mercy of God in Jesus

Mercy comes to completion in Jesus: 'The Law was given through Moses, grace (or mercy) and truth through Jesus Christ' (John 1.17). This becomes clear in the basic cry to Jesus, 'Son of David, have mercy on me' (Mark 10.47, from Bartimaeus, insistently repeated), or from the father of the epileptic boy, 'Lord, have mercy on my son' (Matthew 17.15).

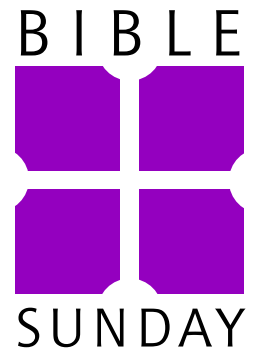
This concept of 'mercy', perpetuated in the liturgical cry at the beginning of the Eucharist, 'Kyrie, eleison/Lord, have mercy', is based on the Hebrew concept of family love expressed in the Hebrew word *hesed* or the Greek *eleos*. Three times in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus uses the text from the prophet Hosea, 'What I want is love/mercy not sacrifice'. The unbreakable obligation of family love was at the basis of Hebrew society. The word is often translated 'faithful love', for fidelity and reliability are ingrained in it. The warmth of parental love is seen in Hosea 11.1-4: 'When Israel was a child I loved him and brought my son out of Egypt. I led him with the leading-strings of love ...' In Judaism brothers must continue to support one another through thick and thin. If a brother falls on bad times and is forced to sell his ancestral inheritance, his brother is obliged to buy it back for him. If a married man dies childless, his nearest male relative must raise up children for him. In the psalms this love is expressed in the frequent refrain, 'for his faithful love endures for ever'. Its strength and the horror of its absence is illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32).

Mercy in the Gospel of Luke

It is a happy coincidence that the Sunday Gospels for this year are drawn primarily from St Luke, where the delicacy and gentleness of the God's mercy, repeatedly expressed by Jesus, are illustrated again and again. Luke is often known as the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi*, 'the scribe of the gentleness of Christ'. In Jesus' own life this is seen in such stories as his gentle and sensitive response to the woman who anointed his feet and bathed them in tears (Luke 7.36-50), his spontaneous welcome to Zacchaeus (19.1-10), the glance which brings Peter to repentance (22.61) and finally his promise to the Good Thief (23.43). The whole of the narrative of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem is bracketed by his tears at the failure of the city to respond to the mercy of God (19.41-44; 23.28-31), and the scene of the crucifixion is dominated by the theme of repentance and forgiveness (23.34, 48). It is further illustrated by such parables as the Good Samaritan and the Wedding Feast.

The whole Bible is the record of divine mercy, as God again and again forgives the failings and desertions of his people, Israel, and renews the covenant they have shattered. This reaches its climax in Jesus, for Jesus is the sacrament of God, showing God's mercy in human form by his healings of all kinds of disabilities and diseases, by his welcome to sinners, by his bringing the alienated back into society. It is fitting, therefore, that Bible Sunday this year should celebrate the mercy of God in a special way at the beginning of this Jubilee Year.

Written by Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB MA (Oxon) STL LSS



BIBLE SUNDAY 2015: PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Second Sunday of Advent - 6 December 2015

You may choose a selection of the prayers provided below in support of your parish's celebration of Bible Sunday.

Priest: Today we celebrate Catholic Bible Sunday. We give thanks for the gift of God's Word, bringing to the Lord now all our needs and those of the world.

Reader: We pray for all those who have never heard the Gospel message. May the Lord send confident and joyful missionaries to them to proclaim the Word of Life.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reader: For all Christians, that their understanding and appreciation of the Gospel might be deepened, so that they encounter the loving and merciful heart of God in a new way.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reader: For those in need of God's Mercy, through the power of the Holy Spirit, may they come to know and receive the transforming power of God's forgiveness.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

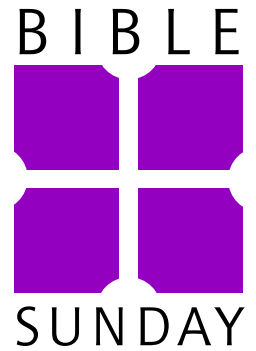
Reader: For the work of the bishops in England and Wales, the Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation, that their efforts to promote and share the Good News of Jesus Christ will bear fruit beyond measure.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reader: That everyone during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, will encounter the 'balm of God's Mercy' and be used as channels of reconciliation where they live and work.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We bring to the Lord our own intentions in a moment of silence.

Priest: Loving Father, you sent your Son to save us from death. During this Advent Season, may our hearts be opened in a new way to receive His life-giving Word. We ask this through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

AMEN.



CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY 2015: PROMOTION

Second Sunday of Advent - 6th December 2015

Can you support Catholic Bible Sunday 2015 on your website, or by adding a few lines to your parish newsletter?

Here's some suggested text to help promote the day and encourage a deepening of our love for the Holy Scriptures.

CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY: 6 DECEMBER 2015 THEME: 'Embracing the Gospel of Mercy'

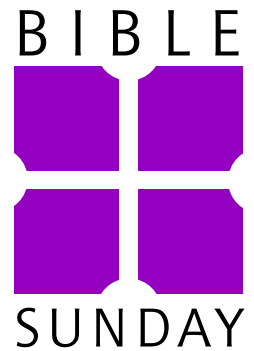
Today we celebrate **Catholic Bible Sunday**, which provides an opportunity for everyone to give thanks for the gift of the Bible, and also invites us to deepen our understanding of its message. The celebration of the Sunday, this year, comes just days before Pope Francis will open the Jubilee Year of Mercy, during which everyone is invited to read again Luke's Gospel, also known as the 'Gospel of Mercy'. Once you've read it, please pass on a copy of the Gospel to someone else that perhaps has never read it as a way of evangelising. Catholic Bible Sunday is an initiative of the Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. For additional information and resources please see: www.thewordofthelord.co.uk

SOCIAL MEDIA

Inspire others by sharing your favourite Bible quote!

GOSPEL GIVE-AWAY

Could your parish purchase copies of the Gospel of Luke to gift to people, as a way of celebrating the opening of the Jubilee Year of Mercy?



CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY 2015: *DEI VERBUM* FOR PARISH NEWSLETTERS

Second Sunday of Advent - 6th December 2015

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council. Below you will find twelve quotes from the document for potential monthly use in your parish newsletter, to cover the year ahead. The aim of these newsletter inclusions is to promote Bible reading, prayer and study.

Dei Verbum 1: God's Word: Work of the Holy Spirit

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*. Here's this month's extract: "Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Dei Verbum 11

Dei Verbum 2: God's Word: Source of Truth

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*. Here's this month's extract: "The books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation."

Dei Verbum 11

Dei Verbum 3: God's Word: The Old Testament

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*. Here's this month's extract: "The books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men." *Dei Verbum* 15

Dei Verbum 4: God's Word: Old and New Testaments

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*. Here's this month's extract: "God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New." *Dei Verbum* 16

Dei Verbum 5: God's Word: The New Testament

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called *Dei Verbum*. Here's this month's extract: "The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (see Rom. 1:16), is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament." *Dei Verbum* 17

Dei Verbum 6: God's Word: The Gospels

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most

important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our saviour." *Dei Verbum* 18

Dei Verbum 7: God's Word: Jesus' Mission

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels... whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven (see Acts 1:1)."

Dei Verbum 19

Dei Verbum 8: God's Word: Venerated

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body."

Dei Verbum 21

Dei Verbum 9: God's Word: Easy Access

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful."

Dei Verbum 22

Dei Verbum 10: God's Word: Learn by Frequent Reading

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

Dei Verbum 25

Dei Verbum 11: God's Word: For Non-Christians

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "...editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another." *Dei Verbum* 25

Dei Verbum 12: God's Word: New Stimulus

The Church recently marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important Catholic documents on the Scriptures called Dei Verbum. Here's this month's extract: "Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similar we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which "lasts forever" (Is. 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25)."

Dei Verbum 26

CATHOLIC BIBLE SUNDAY 2015: LINKS

Second Sunday of Advent - 6th December 2015

One-stop-shop for Bible resource links

<http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/Features-2014/Catholic-Bible-Sunday-2014/Links> Also see: <http://www.thewordofthelord.co.uk/>

Jubilee Year of Mercy

<http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/jubilee-mercy>

A Pilgrimage Companion for the Year of Mercy

<http://shop.alivepublishing.co.uk/new-products/1041-a-pilgrimage-companion-for-the-year-of-mercy-2015-16>

The Gospel of Mercy: Twelve Steps To The Love Of God

<http://www.ctsbooks.org/gospels-of-mercy-1>

The Gospel of Luke

<http://www.ctsbooks.org/the-gospel-according-to-luke-year-of-mercy-1>

The Year of Mercy: Companion to the Sunday Gospels

<http://www.ctsbooks.org/companion-to-the-sunday-gospels-1>

Take and Read

<http://www.alivepublishing.co.uk/2009/11/the-story-of-take-read-by-fr-adrian-graffy/>

Cardinal marks Vatican anniversary calling for a 'new season' of Bible appreciation

<http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/50th-anniversary>

Renewal of Commitment by Readers

<http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/Features-2014/Catholic-Bible-Sunday-2014/Readers>

Materials for Catholic Bible Sunday have been offered by the National Scripture Working Group, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. <http://www.thewordofthelord.co.uk/> Sunday resource coordination: Home Mission Desk.