Archbishop Prendergast's 2011 Letter for Lent

God's Word for Our Lives in Lent

In his recent letter about the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church (*Verbum Domini*), Pope Benedict XVI stresses that the Word of God must be at the heart of everything we do in the Church. Lent is an ideal time to put the Holy Father's insight into practice by learning about, and praying with, God's Word.

Scripture tells the story of God drawing near to his people in love. It records how God's chosen ones turned away from him and how God always drew them back.

The Bible is our story too. We are Abraham and Sarah, called to live by faith, going where God directs us. We can see ourselves also in David, the man after God's heart who sinned grievously and repented.

And we're invited by the Word to model ourselves after Mary, saying yes to God's plan for our lives, struggling to ponder its meaning.

In Scripture, God not only has a voice, he has a face, that of our Lord Jesus. The gospels and epistles invite us to live our lives in union with Jesus. We do this in the household of God—the Church—for it was there that we were united to Christ's risen life in baptism.

During Lent, we are called to pray for those about to be baptized and by prayer, fasting and almsgiving to renew our own commitment to holiness of life.

The gospel for the First Sunday of Lent shows that what God has revealed about himself in Scripture can directly guide and help us meet the challenges we face. In Jesus' rejection of Satan, we see how Scripture can help us overcome any temptation.

The Devil's three temptations of Jesus represent everything and anything that leads us away from God. Satan tries to draw us away from God by concerns about personal comfort and well-being, or by the lure of power or this world's riches.

The Bible says God does not "tempt" humans but "tests" them to see what is in their hearts. Forces opposed to God are sometimes put in impersonal terms: "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 1:16). In effect, all of these forces try to drive a wedge between people and God so that they are tempted not to trust God.

Jesus resisted each of the Devil's blandishments by falling back on His intimate relationship with the Heavenly Father.

The Word of God, in the Book of Deuteronomy, provided the scriptural texts Jesus used to resist each temptation: "One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3); "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (6:16); and "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him" (6:13).

In the liturgy of Ash Wednesday, we hear Jesus speak about the great works of religion: almsgiving, prayer and fasting (whenever you give alms..., whenever you pray..., whenever you fast... [Matthew 6:1-18]). In affirming these ancient practices Jesus gives them a new direction, one that avoids self-seeking, is rooted in hiddenness and joy, and seeks to please God alone.

How can we enter into Lent with Jesus? The first answer is by sharing in Sunday Mass and, when possible, the daily Eucharist. A key part of Mass, of course, is God's self-communication in the Liturgy of the Word.

Each day we can find a few moments to read a portion of God's Word, from the Bible, a missalette, or even the internet. This can be done alone or together with family members, neighbours, or fellow parishioners. Sharing with others how God's Word touches our lives helps them in their struggle to be faithful.

The method known as *Lectio Divina* is an excellent way to draw out the riches of the Word. We can reflect in prayer on the Sunday readings throughout the week or meditate for 15 minutes on the scripture readings of each Lenten weekday. The Holy Father highly recommends this ancient practice in his letter on the importance of the Word of God (cf. *Verbum Domini* #86-87).

May God's Word nourish and strengthen us as we prepare to celebrate the Easter mystery with mind and heart renewed!

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