

**GOSPEL***Luke 1:1-4. 4:14-21*

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received.

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him.

He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.

He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives  
and to the blind new sight,  
to set the downtrodden free,  
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen."

**REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS***23 January, 2022*

In the Gospel of today's liturgy, we see Jesus beginning his preaching (cf. Lk 4:14-21): it is Jesus' first sermon. He goes to Nazareth, where he grew up, and participates in prayer in the synagogue. He gets up to read and, in the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he finds the passage regarding the Messiah who proclaims a message of consolation and liberation for the poor and oppressed (cf. Is 61:1-2). At the end of the reading, "the eyes of all... were fixed on him" (v. 20). And Jesus begins by saying: "Today this scripture

has been fulfilled" (v. 21). Let us dwell on this today. It is the first word of Jesus' preaching recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Pronounced by the Lord, it indicates a "today" that runs through all ages and always remains valid. The Word of God is always "today". It begins with a "today": when you read the Word of God, a "today" begins in your soul, if you understand it well. Today. Isaiah's prophecy dates back to earlier centuries, but Jesus, "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14), makes it relevant and, above all, brings it to fulfilment, and shows how to receive the Word of God: today. It is not like ancient history, no: today. It speaks to your heart today.

Jesus' fellow countrymen are struck by his word. Even though, clouded by prejudice, they do not believe him, they realize that his teaching is different from that of the other teachers (cf. v. 22): they sense that there is more to Jesus. What is there? There is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it happens that our sermons and our teachings remain generic, abstract; they do not touch the soul and the life of the people. And why? Because they lack the power of this today; what Jesus "fills with meaning" in the power of the Spirit, is today. He is speaking to you today. Yes, at times one hears impeccable conferences, well-constructed speeches, which however, do not move the heart and so everything remains as before. Even many homilies — I say this with respect but with pain — are abstract, and instead of awakening the soul, they put it to sleep. When the faithful start looking at their watches — "when will this end?" — they put the soul to sleep. Preaching runs this risk: without the anointing of the Spirit, it impoverishes the Word of God, and deteriorates to moralism or abstract concepts; it presents the Gospel with detachment, as if it were outside time, far from reality. And this is not the way. But a word in which the power of today does not pulsate, is not worthy of Jesus and does not help people's lives. This is why those who preach, please, should be the first to experience the today of Jesus, in order to be able to communicate it in the today of

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others. And if they want to give lectures, conferences, let them do so, but elsewhere, not at the time of the homily where they must give the Word in a way that rouses hearts.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this Sunday of the Word of God, I would like to thank the preachers and proclaimers of the Gospel who remain faithful to the Word that rouses the heart, who remain faithful to “today”. Let us pray for them, that they may live the today of Jesus, the sweet power of his Spirit that makes the Scriptures come alive. The Word of God, is indeed living and active (cf. Heb 4:12); it changes us, it enters into our affairs, it illuminates our daily lives, it comforts and brings order. Let us remember: the Word of God transforms an ordinary day into the today in which God speaks to us. So, let us pick up the Gospel and choose a small passage to read and re-read each day. Keep the Gospel in your pocket or in your bag, to read it on your travels, at any time, and to read it calmly. In time, we will discover that these words are made especially for us, for our life. They will help us welcome each day with a better, more serene outlook because when the Gospel enters into today’s world, it fills it with God. I would like to make a suggestion. On the Sundays of this liturgical year, the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of mercy, is proclaimed. Why not also read it personally, all of it, one small passage each day? A short passage. Let us familiarize ourselves with the Gospel. It will bring us the newness and joy of God!

The Word of God is also the beacon that guides the synodal journey that has begun throughout the Church. As we strive to listen to each other with attention and discernment — because it is not about conducting an inquiry on opinions, no, but about discerning the Word, there — let us listen together to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit. And may Our Lady obtain for us the perseverance to nourish ourselves with the Gospel every day.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** Thinking of homilies that have inspired or moved you, what was different from other homilies which, as Pope Francis says, “put the soul to sleep”?



**Heart:** What is God saying to YOU today through the Gospel?



**Hands:** Pope Francis encourages us to read the Bible personally, all of it, one small passage each day. Do you read the Bible in your personal life? Why or why not? What do you think of Pope Francis’ encouragement?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.