

Christmas Day (B)
(Isaiah 52:7-10 / John 1:1-18)
25.12.2014

This morning I ask myself what word the Lord would have me transmit to you in His name?

Quite simply, the word that comes to me as the key message I should share with you today is that little, but oh so great, statement found at the very heart of the Prologue of John's gospel: ***The Word was made flesh and He came to dwell amongst us.***

If I suggest that we halt our attention on this line it is in order to help us grasp that the Word lives within each one of us.

The Word amongst us is also the Word within us.

Later on in John's gospel Jesus will speak of the how He, the Word, has made His home in our hearts and how He invites us to make our home in Him.

Jesus makes it clear to us that discipleship involves what He calls making His word our home: *Make my word your home.*

This requires of us that we move in and with the Word which is Jesus, that we live with Christ and that we allow Him to live in us and to fashion our words.

The challenge for us is to grow progressively more and more one with the expansive, wide, open, vision that the words of Jesus articulate. This means that we dare to move beyond our narrow definitions which so often actually hinder and stifle growth in a proper understanding of the gospel message.

Let's be honest enough to admit that all so easily we fall into the trap of reducing the breadth of Jesus' words to our own narrow, limited, restricted vision of things?

The point I feel led to make this morning is that **we are all of us called to be living words of God, life-giving words from God, for our brothers and sisters in humanity.**

Our vocation in this respect stems from the fact that the Word of God is within us.

The Word of God is our life.

The thought that we are called to be living words of God should surely awaken within us a sense of responsibility in regard to how we express ourselves.

When I say that, I am not only talking about the audible speech we use, but about our whole way of being.

Think about it.

Do we not all speak and express things to others even before we open our mouths to speak?

We have heard people refer to *body language*, have we not?

There are so many ways of communicating how we are disposed in others' regard before ever a word passes through our lips.

Our interior attitudes in regard to others come through much more than we might think.

Mind you, we are frequently less conscious of the signals we send out than we are of those we pick up.

We speak by our silences too. How often we huff!

My basic point this morning is that **we are all of us words made flesh.**

If we are *words made flesh* we are called to be as the we are told *the Word which was from the beginning* expressed Himself during His earthly life.
Jesus always had a word of life for those He encountered.
He was *the word which is life!*

God's word of life spoken by Christ-Jesus was essentially a loving word which sought to be life-giving for others. Love naturally engenders life. Life is love's outcome.

We might ask ourselves: are we a word of love and life for others?

It is all the more important that you and I strive to be words of life for all our brothers and sisters in humanity, given that so many people no longer approach the inspired, living word of God as contained and transmitted in the Sacred Scriptures.

The fact that many no longer frequent or identify themselves with the Church should make us all the more aware and conscious of our responsibility to be evangelisers, bearers of the Good News to them.

In the past year Pope Francis has reminded all Christians of their responsibility in regard to the proclamation of the Good News in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*. In his own characteristic way (a very simple, but truly profound way), not only in this teaching document, but also in his daily preaching, Pope Francis has continually challenged all of us to be heralds of the Good News for all our brothers and sisters in humanity, especially those who most need a message of cheer, *those whose lives are marked by sadness, distress, trials of one sort or another*.

The message we are told the angels announced at the birth of Christ was a message of peace and joy, a call for all to live in good will.

That same message is ours to proclaim and, as the pope would remind us, we are called to do that by our way of being before ever we announce the message.

While the words we speak are important, they are not the most important thing when it comes to transmitting the gospel.

I often think back to a little flyer that attracted my attention to the Olivetan Benedictines and eventually led me to enter the monastery. It said simply that *Our life is to live the gospel ... the gospel which is the person of Jesus Christ*.

Everything in our life should hinge upon our personal encounter with Jesus and keeping our relationship with Him alive.

The word was made flesh.

The incarnate word is not just a message to deliver, but a person to know, a person like us, a person of flesh.

He is a person we are called to know in the flesh and to make known in our flesh.

Yes, it befalls us to *enflesh* Christ!

It befalls us to *enflesh* the Word!

It is important for us to be reminded that the Word-person, Jesus, lived in a world of words, for it it

is in such a world that we live. This makes attention to the words we use something to be vigilant about.

Our reading of the gospels shows us that Jesus knew the words of prophets spoke before Him and that He made those words His own. His first proclamation in the Synagogue of Nazareth was simply an echoing of Isaiah's prophecy.

Jesus was clearly steeped in and had internalised the words of the Law. He didn't only rhyme off the ordinances contained therein. Jesus went to the heart of the Law and could explain its essence: love! Jesus was nourished by *every word that came forth from the mouth of God Most-High*, just as we should be.

The gospels show us how Jesus detested the manipulation of words, especially by hypocritical religious leaders who He could see used God's word to exercise an unhealthy control over others. For Jesus the purpose of God's word was not to hold people bound, but rather to free them up. For Jesus, God's word was life-giving and energising: and so it should be when we have recourse to it when addressing others! The Word of God should never be manipulated in a way that ties people in knots or lays heavy burdens upon them.

The gospels show us how Jesus was moved by the pitiful words and the inarticulate cries of the poor rather than the eloquent arguments and self-justifications of the rich.

In the gospel accounts we read how Jesus restored the use of speech to the dumb. He liberated words in others that they couldn't articulate hitherto. In his conversations with those He encountered in ministry this is what happened: just think of those meetings of dialogue such as that with the woman of Samaria, or with Peter at the Confession or again that post-resurrection meeting with Simon-Peter recorded for us in John 21.

We know that Jesus' words did not always win Him friends. Many were shocked at what He said. Some of His words disturbed His listeners. He sometimes used forceful words, evoking strong images in doing so. (One could imagine Him speaking the kind of words Pope Francis spoke recently to the members of the Curia in his Christmas address to them.)

Finally, Jesus died with words of humble surrender on His lips.

All this to say that just as words were clearly important for Jesus so too they are, at least should be, important to us as well.

At this point let me share with you an insight of an American Scripture scholar who is also a psychologist, taken from a reflection on the power of speech for Jesus: *Jesus experienced the gamut of human speech. He knew that words had power. He knew that words could heal the heart or betray it. Jesus needed words. He asked others to give Him their words - words of loyalty, words of faith, words of friendship. And, in turn, He shared His words with them.*

This leads me to say that just as Jesus' words had an impact, so too our words have an impact, both positive and negative.

In the same way our silences also have an impact, both positive and negative.

We are called to follow Jesus, to imitate Him, to give echo to His word, to communicate as He did. To communicate as Jesus communicated, to give flesh to His message, means that we first listen to Christ and take His words in for ourselves and allow them to fashion our lives.

The call and the challenge addressed to us to be like the Word we follow.

This means that by our words we should strive to be as encouraging, inviting, comforting, truthful, merciful, inclusive, full of grace and truth, loving as Jesus was. We should strive to reflect those attitudes that we see to have been given flesh in Christ-Jesus' life

Whatever we say (and that also means how we are before ever we speak) should reflect the love, joy and peace which stand at the heart of the gospel proclamation that we are called to echo in this age and generation.

Today we are invited to welcome Christ's love and to spread His message abroad.

I leave the last word (a rhetorical question really) to Pope Francis: *If we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share it with others?*

The call for us is to go and proclaim to others that Christ is born and by our lives to show Him to be alive today!