

CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA
COMMISSION FOR BIBLE



*Word of God
Sunday 2023*

LITURGICAL-PASTORAL RESOURCES

**“Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” [Isa 54:2]:
Recognising the Word of God in our Life
and Responding to It**

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

22 JANUARY 2023



Sunday of the Word of God

Liturgical-Pastoral Resources 2023

Theme

“Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” [Isa 54:2]: Recognising the Word of God in our Life and Responding to It

Day of Celebration

22 January 2023, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

[This date is proposed by our Holy Father in *Aperuit illis*, an apostolic letter ‘*motu proprio*’, in 2019. According to the custom of the regions and the dioceses, the regional chairmen and the local ordinaries may suggest this be celebrated on another day as well.]

1. Introduction

The theme for the Word of God Sunday 2023, “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” [Isa 54:2]: Recognising the Word of God in our Life and Responding to It,’ is inspired from the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the Synod for a Synodal Church 2021-2024. In October 2021 we began our synodal journey at the diocesan level, in Nov – Dec 2022 we have discerned the DCS in the light of our own diocesan synthesis applying the principle of circularity. In the beginning of 2023 the consultation at the continental stage will unfold and in later 2023 we will have the first session of the universal phase. “Along this (synodal) path the lamp to our steps is the word of God, which offers light to reread, interpret, and express the experience that has been lived” (DCS, n. 13). “We are a learning Church, and to be so we need continuous discernment to help us read the word of God and the signs of the times together” (DCS, n. 100).

The prophet Isaiah speaks to the people in exile addressing them with the following words: “Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes, and make firm your pegs” (Isa 54:2). The tent could be compared to our heart. In order to accommodate the word of God we need to enlarge the space of our tent, that is, our heart. Enlarging the space of heart requires that we spread our tent cloths to cover our entire life – spiritual, affective, social, intellectual, and physical, we lengthen the ropes of interpretation through which we make sense of the word, and make firm our pegs of faith in Christ, the word eternal.

The first disciples, whom we see in the gospel reading of the day (cf. Mt 4:12-23, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A) recognise Jesus, the word of God, and his words to them by the Sea of Galilee, and respond to Him by leaving everything and following Him. Jesus in fact enlarges their nets – to be fishers of men, and they in turn enlarge their tent to accommodate and accompany Jesus.

May we open ourselves to the word of God in our personal life, and in community. When our space is enlarged for the word, it is enlarged for the world as well.

2. Objectives of the Word of God Sunday 2023

- a. To initiate in each of us a personal commitment to the reading of the word of God, and living by it through the year.
- b. To enable us to understand and share the richness of God's word through celebration, study, and proclamation.
- c. To strengthen Biblical pastoral ministry in our families, SCCs, parishes, and dioceses.

3. Preparations for the Word of God Sunday 2023

- a. Disseminate the information about the day, and the theme of the Word of God Sunday 2023 at every diocese / parish / SCC, either through print or electronic media.
- b. A pastoral letter may be sent by the regional chairman (in regional language) to every diocese, and by the local ordinary to every parish, narrating the significance of the Word of God Sunday. The parish priest may inform the gathering through the announcements.
- c. Animate the bible apostolate team or the catechists or the catechism teachers or the volunteers in every diocese / parish for the effective celebration.

4. Celebration of the Word of God Sunday 2023

- Putting up the posters in and around the church.
- Carrying the Bible in procession, and enthroning it before the celebration of the Mass.
- Celebration of the Holy Mass, with a homily on the word of God.
- Rite of installation of lectors / catechists could be held at the Diocesan level.
- An exhibition on biblical themes / characters / books could be organized.
- A special stall could be put up for the sale of Bibles.
- Competitions, and quiz programs could be arranged at the parish level.
- A cultural fest could be conducted on Bible songs / drama / films.

- Creative programs such as Bible marathon, hand-written Bible, and Bible through social media could be arranged for the children and the youth.
- Various study programs on Bible – Diploma, Certificate – could be introduced to the people.
- Funds could be raised for printing, and distributing the Bible.
- A resolution be taken by each individual to read and live by the word of God.

5. Liturgy for the Word of God Sunday 2023

Rite of Enthronement of the Word of God during Mass

[It would be good for the ritual of enthronement to take place at least once during the solemn Eucharistic celebration on the Sunday of the Word of God. Next to the altar, or the ambo, or in another specially prepared place (a chapel), an area should be prepared that is raised, decorated and visible to the entire assembly where the sacred text can be placed. After the initial greeting, the celebrant introduces with these or similar words:]

My dear brothers, and sisters, today we have gathered together to celebrate the Sunday of the Word of God. The theme that we have chosen for today's celebration is "Enlarge the Space of Your Tent" [Isa 54:2]: Recognising the Word of God in our Life and Responding to It,' In October 2021 we began the synodal journey at the diocesan level, in Nov – Dec 2022 we have discerned the DCS in the light of our own diocesan synthesis applying the principle of circularity. In the beginning of 2023 the consultation at the continental stage will unfold and in later 2023 we will have the first session of the universal phase. The theme for the continental phase, 'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent' becomes significant to us today as it invites us to enlarge the space of our heart to accommodate and accompany the word of God. Enlarging the space of heart requires that we spread our tent cloths to cover our entire life – spiritual, affective, social, intellectual, and physical, we lengthen the ropes of interpretation through which we make sense of the word, and make firm our pegs of faith in Christ, the word eternal. The first disciples, whom we see in the gospel reading of the day (cf. Mt 4:12-23) recognise Jesus, the word of God, and his words to them by the Sea of Galilee, and respond to Him by leaving everything and following Him. Jesus in fact enlarges their nets – to be fishers of men, and they in turn enlarge their tent to accommodate and accompany Jesus. May we open ourselves to the word of God in our personal life, and in community. When our space is enlarged for the word, it is enlarged for the world as well.

Now, the word of God is being carried in procession. As we honour it let us resolve to be the keen listeners and constant doers of the Word.

[The Main Celebrant carries / receives the Bible and places it on a decorated ambo / table and garlands it. Homage could be done by incensing. As a sign of veneration, devotion, and love for the Word of God all would extend their hands towards the Bible enthroned and resolve to be listeners and doers of the Word.]

First Reading (Isaiah 9:1-4)

Introduction: Zebulun and Naphtali, because of their locations near the Assyrian territory, were prone to vulnerability, subjection, and oppression. Brutality, poverty, and hunger rendered the land dark without hope, and power. Amidst this comes a shining light, which gives people great rejoicing, and cancels the oppressive yoke from their shoulders. Light symbolizes God's creative work. People who recognise the light, in fact, recognise the one who acts on their behalf. Joy is the response of the people.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14)

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17)

Introduction: Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthian community, which was full of dissension and strife, puts forward a series of questions to evoke them to self-awareness and conversion. When they were divided based on the hands that baptized them, Paul invites them not to look at the hands that baptized them, but on the baptismal water that united them. Further he adds that his apostolic duty lies not in baptizing but in proclaiming the Gospel. The text invites us to have our baptism as the foundational experience for the proclamation of the word.

Lectio Divina on Matthew 4:12-23

Preparing to Listen (Statio)

Preparing to listen means to move from hearing to listening. It is easy to hear the words of Scripture, it is not as easy to listen to the Word that vibrates in its pages. Listening to the Word implies an active and deliberate choice. Let us allow ourselves to be at the disposal of the Word that we may be charmed by it.

Proclamation of the Word

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Prayerful Reading (Lectio)

Let us reread the text personally, even the previous passage, because it is the background that precedes it. Let us playback the verbs of action, subjects, nouns, adjectives. Let us not race through the text eagerly, but let it flow slowly and persist in our mind and heart, like waves caressing a shoreline.

The text narrates the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, his calling of the first disciples who collaborate in his mission, and his ministry which is characterised by the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom and healing of diseases. Matthew says that Jesus withdrew to Galilee. This withdrawal is not out of hesitation or fear, but it is for preparation. Galilee becomes the launching pad of Jesus’ mission. Jesus leaves his hometown Nazareth and lives in Capernaum.

Meditation (Meditatio)

The gospel reading could be divided into three sections: (i) Jesus begins his public ministry; (ii) Jesus calls his first disciples; and (iii) Summary of Jesus’ ministry – proclamation of the word and healing of diseases.

The arrest of John sets the backdrop to the ministry of Jesus. In a way in flashforwards what awaits Jesus at the end of his public ministry. What is Capernaum? Linguistically, the word 'Capernaum' is the combination of two Hebrew words 'kapar' ('village'), 'naham' ('to be sorry' or 'to comfort'). The word means 'village of comfort.' Capernaum is a sea-coast village of Galilee, probably somewhere on the border between the territories of Naphtali and Zebulun. It was established as a town in the Hasmonean period (c. 2nd cent. BCE).

The evangelist Matthew by 'moving' Jesus from his hometown Nazareth to Capernaum accomplishes two things: (i) He presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isa 9:1-4; (ii) He takes on the theme of light and revelation in Mt 2:1-12 and expands that Jesus is the light to the Gentiles.

Why does Jesus move from Nazareth to Capernaum? Nazareth was Jesus' hometown, the locus of Jesus' private life. Jesus had his roots there. Nazareth refers to Jesus' rootedness. Capernaum becomes the place of Jesus' public life, where he would open himself up to the world. Thus, Capernaum refers to Jesus' openness. Jesus does not choose the political and religious capital of Jerusalem as his locus for public ministry; nor does he choose Gerizim, the worship-place in Samaria, but chooses a town in the Gentile territory. By choosing Capernaum as the starting point for his public ministry Jesus delineates his ministry. The recipients of his message are the poor, the marginalized, the vulnerable, and the excluded.

Jesus' preaching – "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" – consists of an imperative and an indicative. The imperative is that people must have a conversion of heart, and the indicative is that God's presence has come close to them. The word 'repent' implies not only spiritual restoration, but also social and personal restoration. This means to do away with one's past life, and to leave one's comfort zone.

In the second section, Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee calls his first disciples. Simon and Andrew are casting their nets into the sea. They were busy with their daily chores. James and John were mending their nets. They were preparing for the next big catch. Jesus encounters them when they were occupied with their personal and professional concerns. His call was simple: 'follow me.' Without any if's and but's they followed him. It seems as if they were waiting for an invitation. Jesus gives them a larger vision of fishing men.

The third section presents Jesus as the proclaimer of the Gospel and the healer of the diseases. Jesus' ministry of the word is coupled with action of healing. In other words, the proclamation of the word is paired with authentication by signs.

Prayer (Oratio e Contemplatio)

Now let our hearts rise in prayer. We pray that we may hear Jesus' invitation to repent; that we may hear and respond to his call; and that we may be healed of our iniquities.

Discernment and Action (Deliberatio e Actio)

(i) Have we found the Capernaum of our life? Have we moved from our place of rootedness to our place of openness? What are the areas in our life that need conversion, decluttering, and clearing of space?

(ii) Jesus enlarges the space of the tent of the first disciples by calling them to follow Him. The disciples immediately follow Him. They recognise Jesus and respond to Him. Jesus comes to us when we are on the seashore of our life – casting and mending our nets, carried away by our griefs and anxieties, with our tears and sweat. Do we recognise Him? And respond to Him? What are the challenges to our recognising Him? And what are the obstacles that hinder our response?

(iii) Do we realize our baptismal responsibility to proclaim the word, and to heal the world? In our family, community, and society?

Prayers of the Faithful

Celebrant: Gathered as the people of God, sustained by the Word of God, and called to be missionary disciples of Christ, together let us pray:

For the Church: that rooted in the Word of God, we may continue to build up the Body of Christ and promote the common good. Lord, we pray.

For all who teach and preach the Word of God: that their words may renew the faith of those who listen and encourage them to trust in the promise of God. Lord, we pray.

For this community: that we may have an ever-greater openness to the Word of God and allow it to enlighten the darkness of our hearts and free us to follow Jesus evermore faithfully. Lord, we pray.

For our companions on the synodal journey: that God will heal us from indifference and intolerance, so that all may work together for care for common home and humanity. Lord, we pray.

[In silence let us pray for our personal and local needs.]

Celebrant: Everlasting God, your Son, the eternal Word, echoed on the seashore of Galilee inviting people to repent and to follow. As we proclaim your words of life, strengthen our faith that we may read with conviction and boldness, and put into practice what we read. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Final Blessing [At the end of the celebration the following blessing can be given:]

C. May God Almighty remove all evil from you and grant you the gifts of his blessing.

R. Amen.

C. Make your hearts attentive to his Word, so that you may walk in the way of his teaching.

R. Amen.

C. May He help you to understand what is good and right, so that you become joint heirs of the eternal city.

R. Amen.

C. And may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father and Son + and Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.

R. Amen.

6. Word of God through the Year

- Bible for all, and all for Bible. Let us become Bib-literate this year.
- Bible for the differently abled. Communicate to them in their way.
- Bible for the elderly and the old. Read a verse for them.
- Biblical formation programs at the parishes / schools / formation houses.
- Bible camps for the youth and the children.
- Reading the Bible every day at home, and at neighbourhood.
- Promoting Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) in families, parishes, and religious institutions.
- Establishing 'Bible Banks' for free distribution of the bible.
- Presenting Bible on the occasions as gifts and mementos.
- Writing on the journals and the magazines. Publishing leaflets on biblical themes / texts.
- Enrolling for postal / online courses on bible (www.stpaulbiblecollege.com).
- Establish Catholic biblical presence in the media, and in the social network platform.

