A. Today is the “Sunday of the Word of God”, as declared by Pope Francis. The homily should in some way make a connection to the practice of reading Sacred Scripture.

i. The first reading from Nehemiah provides us a good foundation for why we should study Scripture.
   1. Ezra is the last surviving priest from the First Temple age. Following the ending of the Babylonian Captivity, Ezra assists in bringing the Hebrews back into the promised land and to Jerusalem.
   2. The reading we are given in today’s Mass tells the story of Ezra reading the Torah to the new generation of Hebrews who had returned from Babylon. This constitutes the restoration of Torah reading in the promised land after being absent for a generation.

ii. Ezra brings out the scroll of the Torah and everyone rises in reverence, then prostrate themselves in adoration of God. Ezra then reads the scrolls to them.
   1. The return of the reading of Scripture to Jerusalem is both a moment of adoration/awe at God’s mighty deeds as well as joy: “Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep.”
   2. The reading of Scripture, for the Hebrew, was done both to educate in the practice of the faith/moral life, and also as a way of experiencing the Presence of God.

iii. In the Gospel, Christ fulfills the same office by reading Scripture. He then reveals Himself to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, but in a greater way we see that Christ is the fulfillment of all the law and prophets. He is God’s Presence, because He is God-made-man.
   1. Because of the Incarnation, encountering the Presence of God is possible to us both in the reading of Holy Scripture, and in our worship of the Holy Eucharist, which is why the Second Vatican Council defines Scripture and Tradition as the two fonts of Divine Revelation.

B. Practically speaking, we as Catholics should learn from the reverence the Hebrews had for Sacred Scripture in the first reading.

i. Scripture is not a self-help manual, but an encounter with the living God. God Himself speaks to us in Holy Scripture, which makes the words of scripture “living and effective”.

ii. This is what distinguishes Scripture from ancient mythology, or even popular modern self-improvement writers such as Jordan Peterson.
   1. We don’t read scripture purely to learn about the history of Israel, or to memorize lists of important things to live (the Beatitudes are not the same as Peterson’s “12 Rules for Life”).
   2. Jesus Christ speaks to us in new ways each time we open the Scriptures.
iii. Catholics should include scripture reading in their prayer lives. This can be aided by meditations or devotional books, but no other book can replace the importance of Scripture. Even better if we are able to take a copy of Scripture with us to the Church and read in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

1. When we are in front of the tabernacle, the same God whom we read and encounter in Holy Scripture is living and Present before us in the Flesh.

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