

## **“Sunday of the Word of God” to replace “Bible Sunday” from 2021 onwards**

The Second Vatican Council and the promulgation of **Dei Verbum**, the **Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation** in 1965 gave great impulse to the rediscovery of the word of God. Given this impetus as well as a growing awareness of Scripture as a source of spiritual renewal, the Bible has in recent decades been steadily gaining the attention of Catholics.

Catholics in our region of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have in the last 20 years or so been celebrating **Bible Sunday** annually in July – an event that the Bishops’ Conference of our region has entrusted the Regional Biblical Commission to promote. For more than 20 years, an annual document or message has been produced, a diploma bible course been devised and taught locally and many initiatives at diocesan and parish level have been promoted in order that Catholics will learn to love and live the Bible in their daily lives.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that despite all our efforts, *“the overwhelming majority of Catholics are not familiar with sacred Scripture. For many, the only time they hear the word of God is when they attend Mass”* (*Aperuit Illis*, §5). Thus, while we would not want to downplay the progress made so far, we need to continue the mission of inviting all Catholics into a renewed relationship with the Word of God, not just as a mere book but rather as God’s Word that is active and alive in our daily lives. We need to help every Catholic deepen their appreciation, love and faithful witness to God and his Word.

It is therefore heart-warming that our local initiative along with that of so many other dioceses and archdioceses across the Catholic world has now been given universal attention by the **“Sunday of the Word of God”** established by Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter, Motu proprio **“Aperuit illis”**, published on 30 September 2019, the Feast of St Jerome. While we previously had our local Bible Sunday celebration in July, the Pope has decreed that *“the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (in January) is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the Word of God”* (*Aperuit Illis*, §3).

**At their 105<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly in January 2020, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei further decided that, beginning 2021, the Sunday of the Word of God would now replace Bible Sunday** Hence Bible Sunday remained in our 2020 regional calendar but the Covid-19 pandemic meant that not much could be done apart from the dissemination of the customary message.

Of course, locally, we will have to adjust our minds around the timing of the Sunday of the Word of God, coming as it does so early in the year, particularly with the school year just having started and Sunday Schools/ Catechism Sessions which propelled much of the Bible Sunday activities, just getting off the ground again. This change may initially prove challenging, even difficult, to organize much for the actual day/weekend itself.

In this respect, the Sunday of the Word of God must now be seen as a springboard to announce the various scripture activities planned for the year rather than the singular day when it all happens. After all, God’s Word is to be read and lived out

each and every day of the year. We must appreciate the great value that the Word of God occupies in our *daily* existence. Informed and formed by the Word, we are then enabled to carry out our mission to announce the Good News to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

Notwithstanding the fact that these have been a hallowed part of our Bible promotion programs in the past, here is a list some proposals from Pope Francis has in (*Aperuit illis*, §3) to celebrate the Sunday of the Word of God:

1. Enthroned the sacred text.
2. Highlight the proclamation of the Word of the Lord.
3. Emphasise the honour due to the word of God in the homily.
4. Celebrate the Rite of Installation of Lectors or a commissioning of Readers.
5. Provide training for Readers.
6. Give a Bible, or one of its books, to everyone.
7. Encourage people to read and pray with Scripture daily, especially through the practice of *lectio divina*.

The Regional Bible Commission would like to acknowledge the efforts of the many dedicated men and women of all ages, lay, religious and priests, who have contributed so much to the increase in biblical literacy and a love for the Word of God in our region. Without your cooperation and selfless contribution, the progress achieved would have not been possible. Let us together recommit ourselves so Pope Francis' intention can be achieved ever more widely: "*May the Sunday of the Word of God help his people to grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the sacred Scriptures*" (*Aperuit Illis*, §15).

Issued by:

**Regional Bible Commission  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei**

Feast of St Jerome  
30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

#### References:

Apostolic Letter issued "Motu Proprio" by the Supreme Pontiff Francis:: "Aperuit Illis"(Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God)" on 30/09/2019  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930\\_aperuit-illis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930_aperuit-illis.html)

#### Useful links:

Singapore Archdiocese Bible Apostolate:  
<https://biblicalapostolate.wordpress.com/>

Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese Bible Apostolate:  
<http://myklaba.org/>

