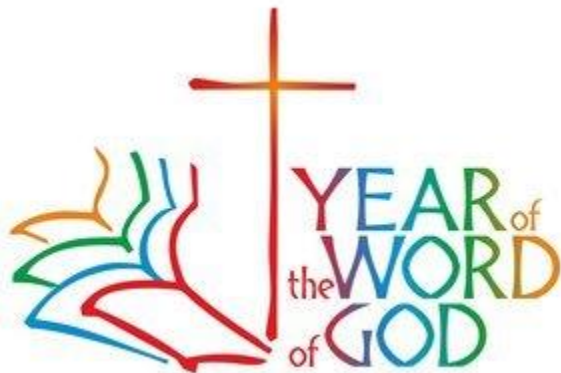




***“SPEAK LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING” (1 SAM 3: 10)***



***A Pastoral Letter on the Word of God by the Catholic Bishops of Zambia***

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1 Cor .....	First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians
1Kgs .....	First Book of Kings
1 Pet .....	First Letter of St. Peter
1 Thess .....	First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians
Acts .....	Book of the Acts of the Apostles
AI .....	<i>Aperuit Illis</i> by Pope Francis
2 Cor .....	Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians
Chr .....	Book of Chronicles
CCC .....	The Catechism of the Catholic Church
Cf .....	Confer
CT.....	Catechesis Tradendae
CV.....	Christus Vivit by Pope Francis
DV.....	Die Verbum, Vat. II on Divine Revelation
EIA.....	Ecclesia in Africa
Deut.....	Book of Deuteronomy
EG.....	Evangelii Gaudium by Pope Francis
Eph.....	Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Ex.....	Book of Exodus
Ezk.....	Book of Prophet Ezekiel
Gen.....	Book of Genesis
Heb.....	Letter to the Hebrews
LS.....	Laudato Si by Pope Francis
Jas.....	Letter of St. James
Jer.....	Book of Prophet Jeremiah
Jn.....	The Gospel According to St. John
Lk.....	The Gospel According to St. Luke
Mk.....	The Gospel According to St. Mark
Matt.....	The Gospel According to St. Matthew
Is.....	Book of Prophet Isaiah
Num.....	Book of Numbers
Phil.....	Letter of St. Paul to Philippians
Ps.....	Psalm
Rev.....	The Book of Revelation
Rom.....	Letter of St. Paul to the Romans
SC.....	Sacrosanctum Concilium
#(s).....	Number(s)
VD.....	Verbum Domini by Pope Benedict XVI
Wis.....	Book of Wisdom
ZCCB.....	Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops

## INTRODUCTION

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:105).*

1. To the clergy, consecrated men and women and the Catholic lay faithful in Zambia.
2. We, the Bishops, cordially greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.
3. We have dedicated the Year 2020 to reflecting on the Word of God. Accordingly, we have chosen the Word of God as our pastoral theme. Our aim as the Catholic Church in Zambia is to venerate, celebrate, study, disseminate and live the Word of God; so that it becomes the centre of all aspects of life. This is in line with our Strategic Plan whose vision is: *A unified and empowered Conference of Catholic Bishops in Zambia that is **inspired by the Word of God**.*
4. After the First African Synod in 1994, St John Paul II underlined the importance of biblical apostolate by saying: **“In order that the Word of God may be known, loved, pondered and preserved in the hearts of the faithful (Cf. Lk 2: 19, 51), greater efforts must be made to provide access to the Sacred Scriptures ...”**<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in this and the following years, greater efforts and pastoral commitment will need to be seen in the way the Church in Zambia will be able to mobilise the needed human, material and financial resources towards making biblical apostolate a pastoral priority and the centre of all ecclesial activities.

## I. BIBLICAL INSPIRATION OF THE PASTORAL LETTER

*“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:1-10).*

5. In the first Book of Samuel, Hannah the mother of Samuel had been barren and was given a child having prayed for him to God. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord, and after Hannah weaned him, he lived at the temple of Shiloh under the care of Eli the priest.
6. One day, while sleeping in the temple near the Ark of God, he is awakened by the sound of someone calling his name. He runs to Eli, who says he did not call him and sends him back to bed. It happens again with the same result. Then the author of the Book of Samuel tells us: *“Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*(EA), #58.

*Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy. So, Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening'" (1 Sam 3:7-10).*

7. This story teaches us several things:

- a) **You can pray and yet fail to know God, at least not knowing him intimately.** Verse 10 tells us: *"Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him."* Samuel had been worshipping Yahweh in the sanctuary (1 Sam 1:28b) and serving before him (1 Sam 3:1); assisting in the priestly duties, but without knowing God. We hope that the Year of the Word of God will be a privileged time of growing in our intimate knowledge of the Lord. Let us also remember the words of St. Jerome: *"Ignorance of the scriptures, is ignorance of Christ."*
- b) **You can hear God speaking, but not recognise that it is God.** We may not recognise God's voice the first time we hear it.
- c) **Sometimes a mature and experienced person can help us learn to recognise and respond to God's voice.** Eli recognised what was happening and instructed Samuel on what to say if it happened again (1 Sam 3:9). We therefore urge the clergy, especially biblical scholars, to explain the Scriptures so that the faithful may understand the Word as God speaks to them.
- d) **We must come before God as humble and obedient servants if we are to hear what He is saying.** It is quite possible to hear without listening. In each of the four Gospels, Jesus quotes Isaiah to explain his reason for teaching in parables: *"That they may listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me"* (Is 6:9-10).

8. In this Year of the Word of God, we urge all members of the Church that we properly dispose ourselves in order to allow God to speak to us, recognise his voice and listen to him through prayer. Let us remember that we listen to God when we read and study the Holy Scriptures as well as when we share the Word of God.

## Questions for Reflection

- a) *Do I know the Lord present in the Word intimately?*
- b) *Do I recognise the voice of God speaking to me in the Scriptures?*
- c) *Is there room for improvement in my disposition towards the Word of God?*

## II. THE NATURE OF THE WORD OF GOD

*"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn 6:63).*

9. There are different meanings of the phrase 'Word of God' in the Bible:

- a) **The Word of God as the creative and sustaining personal Speech of God:** Sometimes, God's Word takes the form of powerful decrees that cause events to happen or even cause things to come into being, as in the case of creation (cf. Gen 1: 3, Gen 1: 24, Ps 33: 6). These decrees of God include not only the events of the original creation, but also the continuing existence of all things as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews puts it that Christ is continually "upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb 1:3).

God at times communicates with people on earth by speaking directly to them. These can be called instances of God's Word of personal address, like when he speaks to Adam at creation and after the Fall (cf. Gen 2:16-17, Gen 3:16-19) and when he gives the commandments to Moses (Ex 20:1-3).

Frequently in the Scriptures, God raises people for mission (cf. Deut 18:18-20, Jer 1:9, Ex 4:12, Ezek 13:1-7). Thus, God's Word spoken through human lips was considered to be just as authoritative and just as true as God's Word of personal address.

In addition to God's Word of decree, God's Word of personal address and God's Word spoken through the lips of human beings, we also find in Scripture several instances where God's Word was put in written form, the Holy Scriptures (cf. Ex 31:18, Ex 32:16; 34:1, 28, Deut 31:9-13, Deut 31:24-26, Josh 24:26). Thus, the Church teaches that both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition form one deposit of faith.<sup>2</sup>

- b) **The Word of God as Power:** The Old Testament emphasizes the dynamic, creative and revealing character of the Word of God (cf. Jer 5:14, Jer 23:29). However, when we turn to the New Testament, we find that the activity that was characteristic of God alone is now shared by Jesus. To

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. DV, #10.

give effect to his will, Jesus has only to utter it, and thus we are led to see that in Jesus is the power of the Word of God (cf. Matt 8:3; Mk 7:34; Lk 7:14, Matt 8:32 Mk 4:39, Matt 9:6; Mk 2:10-11). Since the words of Christ have a self-realising efficacy, all the things that he has spoken must be fulfilled: "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away**" (Matt 24:35).

- c) The Word of God as the Person of Jesus Christ: The Pre-existent Son of God and the Ultimate Revelation:** In the prologue to his gospel, John tells us that Jesus, the Word of God, existed with God in eternity and the Word was God and He came to dwell among us (Jn 1: 1-2, 14), and he is the ultimate revelation of God (cf. Jn 14: 10-11, Col 1: 15-20, Phil 2: 6-11, Heb 1: 1-2).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- 1) *What is the obstacle to the Word of God bearing fruit in me?*
- 2) *God speaks through the Holy Scriptures, do I find time to listen to Him?*

## **III. THE WORD OF GOD EVOKES AND NOURISHES FAITH**

*"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3; cf. Acts 7:38)*

10. The Word of God is the "Word of faith" (Rom 10:8). Thus, faith is the expected human response to the preached Word. We believe in the Word (Jn 4:50; cf. Mk 1:15), but being the focus of faith, the Word is also the source that gives rise to the very acceptance of itself. The Word constantly nourishes this faith, the growth of which will cease only with the end of our life on earth (Eph 2:8; cf. Rom 12:3).
11. The nourishing character of the Word is often taught in Scripture (cf. Deut 8:3; cf. Acts 7:38, Matt 4:4, Ps 119:103; cf. 19:10[11], Ps 119:131, Jer 15:16, Ezek 3:1, 3, Rev 10:8-11) . The book of Wisdom makes the Word of God superior to any earthly food (Wis 16:26). It is, consequently, a terrible divine punishment, a terrible hunger, said Amos, to be starved for God's Word and not be able to find it (Amos 8:11-12).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- a) *How can the Word of God nourish my faith?*
- b) *Do I feel the hunger for the Word of God?*

#### IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE WORD OF GOD IN DAILY LIFE

*"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"  
(Ps 119:103; cf. 19:10-11).*

12. The Word of God has power and is efficacious to bring about positive change in the life of people.
13. The essential character and inexhaustible vitality and efficacy of the Word of God is clearly defined in Is 55:10-11: "**as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I have purpose for, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**"
14. The Word of God brings divine comfort and hope to people in the depths of their being (cf. Is 40:1-2, Ps 130:5; cf. 19:7-11[8-12]). One writer of the Church, Origen, once said that "**God's Word is the soul's physician**" (*Commentary on Exodus, PL 12.269B*).
15. Therefore, the Word of God is active and effective by virtue of what it proclaims: the Word of reconciliation reconciles (2 Cor 5:18-20) and the Word of salvation saves (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18); the Word of grace brings grace (Acts 14:3; 20:32) and the Word of life, or living word, communicates life (Heb 4:12).

#### Questions for Reflection

- 1) *How does the Word of God influence my choices in life?*
- 2) *How often do I meditate on the Word of God?*
- 3) *What are the effects of the Word of God?*

#### V. INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

*"I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your Word" (Psalm 119:15-16).*

16. The primary setting for scriptural interpretation is in the life of the Church; for the Bible was written within the Church, for the Church and was compiled by the Church. Therefore, trying to interpret the Scriptures outside the living Tradition of the Church can be misleading. This is due to the fact that the same Spirit which inspired the sacred authors and guided the

Church to gather those writings into one Book of books also directs the Church in her interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

17. Furthermore, Pope Benedict XVI says: **“The Synod frequently insisted on the need for a prayerful approach to the sacred text as a fundamental element in the spiritual life of every believer, in the various ministries and states in life, with particular reference to *Lectio Divina*. The Word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality.”**<sup>4</sup>
18. ***Lectio divina*** (sacred reading) is a prayer method for reading and praying with the Bible. It has basically five (5) steps:
  - a) *Lectio* (reading);
  - b) *Meditatio* (meditation);
  - c) *Oratio* (prayer);
  - d) *Contemplatio* (contemplation); and
  - e) *Actio* (action) – The action is a result of one’s encounter with God in Scripture. Indeed, the Word of God spurs us to translate our faith into action.
19. Thus, the Church in Zambia will do well to give heed to the call for a wide practice of *Lectio Divina*. In that way, the light of the Gospel will illumine the people’s daily lives, their joys and sorrows as well as their hopes and anxieties.<sup>5</sup>

### **Questions for Reflection**

- a) *How do I approach the Holy Scriptures?*
- b) *How do I do Lectio Divina?*
- c) *What is the benefit of Lectio Divina in the life of a Christian?*

## **VI. THE WORD OF GOD IN PASTORAL MINISTRY**

*“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).*

20. As we have already said, the Word of God should imbue the entire pastoral life of the Church and become its centre. Here, we would like to highlight specific areas of pastoral apostolate that need a lot of attention:
21. **Catechesis:** The Church calls for a new and deeper form of catechesis, one that is biblical in content, method and its expression. Thus, the Church rightly argues that **“An important aspect of the Church’s pastoral work**

---

<sup>3</sup> VD, #29.

<sup>4</sup> VD, # 86.

<sup>5</sup> GS, #1.



**which, if used wisely can help in rediscovering the centrality of God's Word is catechesis, which in its various forms and levels must constantly accompany the journey of the people of God.”<sup>6</sup>**

**22. Justice and Peace:** Quoting the Word of God, Jesus declared: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Lk 4: 18).* Pope Benedict XVI further says that **“God's Word inspires men and women to build relationships based on rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God's eyes of every effort to create a more just and more liveable world.”<sup>7</sup>** In other words, the Word of God should inspire and impel us to work for justice and peace. Therefore, the Word of God is both the springboard and the reason for our involvement in the work of justice and peace.

**23. Reconciliation and Peace Building:** The Word of God is also a tool of healing tensions among people: **“In the present context it is more necessary than ever to rediscover the word of God as a source of reconciliation and peace, since in that word God is reconciling to himself all things: Christ ‘is our peace,’ the one who breaks down the walls of division.”<sup>8</sup>** Thus, the Word of God is the sure source of genuine reconciliation, social justice and lasting peace. Jesus, the Word of God brings peace; for **“through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”** (Col 1: 20) and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 18-21).

**24. Care of Creation:** All creation came into existence through the Word of God (Gen 1: 1-2:4, Jn1: 1-3) and is sustained by him (Heb 1:3). The earth and all life on it are part of God's creation. We are called to respect this gift. **“The arrogance of human beings who live ‘as if God did not exist’ leads them to exploit and disfigure nature, failing to see it as the handiwork of the creative Word.”<sup>9</sup>** Examples of lack of care for the earth include air and water pollution by industry and agriculture, improper waste and sewerage disposal, destruction of soil by poor farming techniques, land degradation through activities such as mining and deforestation, among others. Some of these lead to global warming and eventually climate change.

We are responsible for taking care of the world we live in and for sharing all the wonders and resources the earth gives us. Pope Francis in *Laudato si* says: **“The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior**

---

<sup>6</sup> VD, #74.

<sup>7</sup> VD, #100.

<sup>8</sup> VD, #102.

<sup>9</sup> VD, #108.

**conversion...Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.**"<sup>10</sup> The Word of God can help bring about this conversion and co-responsibility for the care of the earth.

**25. Sacred Liturgy:** *"Liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond. Every liturgical action is by its nature steeped in sacred Scripture."*<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in order for the liturgy to continually be a place of encounter with the Word of God, the faithful must prepare, deepen, and assimilate the Word of God through a prayerful and faith-filled reading of the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Borrowing the words of Pope Francis, we **"... encourage the Church's pastors and all engaged in pastoral work to see that all the faithful learn to savor the deep meaning of the word of God which unfolds each year in the liturgy, revealing the fundamental mysteries of our faith."**<sup>13</sup>

**26. Health Care:** In the gospel of *Luke (12: 1-10)*, **Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. They set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.** Therefore, health care is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. As such, Pope Francis says that **participation in the provision of health care is a way of bringing the Word of God to the people.**<sup>14</sup> In other words, health care is a way of evangelisation, for at its core is the implementation of the Word of God.

**27. The Means of Social Communication:** *The whole understanding of what communication in the Church means is based upon the realization that the Word of God communicates himself...*<sup>15</sup> Therefore, essentially, the aim of the Church's use of the means of social communication is the spreading of the Word of God. However, **"the modern mass media are not only instruments of communication, but also a world to be evangelized."**<sup>16</sup> Therefore, we urge all Catholic media houses, both print and electronic, to be inspired by Christ, the Word of God, the communicator par excellence.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. #217.

<sup>11</sup> VD, # 52

<sup>12</sup> VD, #99.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. VD, #52.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. By vaticannews.va and Munir Bayouk-en.abouna.org

<sup>15</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communication, Pastoral Instruction: *"Aetatis Novae,"* On Social Communications on the Twentieth Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*, Vatican City, February 22, 1992, 10, 11.

<sup>16</sup> EA, # 124.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. EA, #122.

We call upon them to have dedicated radio and television programs on the Word of God.

- 28. Catholic Education:** In the second letter of St. Paul to Timothy, we read that: **“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).** Therefore, Catholic education should be inspired by the Word of God, in order to teach, correct and train listeners, readers and viewers in virtuous living.
29. By her very nature, the Church has the right and the obligation to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:20). In the introduction to the Vatican II document *Declaration On Christian Education*, Pope Paul VI says that: *“To fulfill the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education.”*<sup>18</sup>
30. *Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others... and helping his uplifting Gospel to take root in the hearts of the faithful... The cause of Catholic education is the cause of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel at the service of man.*<sup>19</sup> This is what our Catholic schools and institutions of education should be all about. As such, they should design programs that help to promote the Word of God.
- 31. Veneration of the Word of God:** It is shocking at times to see the Bible treated like a common book, lying on the floor or under a chair. This happens in public gatherings and even in Churches. We can take a leaf from the Jews. They regard the Torah very highly. They do not touch it with their bare hands. So, to read the Torah they use a “Torah Pointer,” a reading stick with a pointed finger on the end. They have deep reverence for the Word of God.
- 32. We exhort every family to have a Bible,** whether they are able to read or not. The written Word of God is a sign of faith, so it should be enthroned both at home and in the Church. It should also be kept clean. This should also be taught to children. When giving the commandments, God told the Israelites, *“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts...impress them on your children”* (Deut 6:6-7).

---

<sup>18</sup> Pope Paul VI Declaration On Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, October 28, 1965.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Message to the National Catholic Educational Association of the United States*, Vatican, 16 April 1979.

33. God commanded Joshua as the leader of Israel, **“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (Joshua 1:8).** During the first reformation and renewal in Judah, the God-fearing king Josiah (622 B.C.) “tore his robes” when he rediscovered the Book of the Law in the Temple of the Lord. King Josiah was humbled and responsive, so he renewed the covenant and initiated a reformation in Judah (2 Kings 22-23). In Nehemiah 8, after the return from exile, all the Israelites gathered to listen when Ezra opened the Book of the Law of Moses, standing on a high platform built for the occasion.
34. **The Bible is not just a book. It is the word of God and the “bread of life,” through which God speaks, nourishes and guides us.** The published Bible is a witness to the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. We need to treat the Bible with respect and to handle it with care.
35. Therefore, the celebration of the Year of the Word of God should help us chart the road map towards, not only a renewed biblical apostolate in Zambia, but also improved pastoral activities imbued by the Word of God; including catechesis, liturgy as well as the provision of social services in the field of education and health, among others.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- a) *How has the word of God influenced the above areas of pastoral ministry?*
- b) *In which areas has the word of God not penetrated enough?*
- c) *How can we best revere the written word of God?*

## **VII. MESSAGE OF APPEAL**

*“Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth... whatever I command you shall speak’” (Jer. 1:7-9).*

36. Due to the foregoing, we would like to make a message of appeal to all the faithful in Zambia:
- 37. To Parents:** Parents as teachers should impress on the children their spiritual roots, and above all, the sharing of the Word of God with them. We also urge you parents to be gentle with your children, as the Word says: **“do not frustrate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6: 4).**

- 38. To the Youth and Young Adults:** The advice of Pope Francis to young people is also ours: *“If you are young in years, but feel weak, weary or disillusioned, ask Jesus to renew you. With him, hope never fails.”*<sup>20</sup> The Holy Father adds: **“No matter how much you live the experience of these years of your youth, you will never know their deepest and fullest meaning unless you encounter each day your best friend, the friend who is Jesus.”**<sup>21</sup> This can only be possible through reading and praying with the Holy Scriptures. There are many role models for you in the Bible such as Ruth (1: 16-17), Samuel (1 Sam 3: 1-18), Joseph son of Jacob (Gen 37), David (1 Sam 17: 38-51), Daniel (1: 1-17), Timothy (1 Tim 2:22) and Jeremiah (1: 6). They are renowned for great things, because they listened and obeyed the Word of God. We exhort you to be famous for virtue and not vice.
- 39. To Men:** We say with Pope Francis: **“We should never take God’s Word for granted, but instead let ourselves be nourished by it, in order to acknowledge and live fully our relationship with him and with our brothers and sisters.”**<sup>22</sup> This you must do as heads of your families; love the Word of God and share it with your families. The Bible has a lot of men that you should imitate; like Noah (Gen 6: 9), Abraham (Gen 12, Gen 22), Moses (Ex 3: 1-20), Jethro (Ex 18: 1-27), Joshua (Josh 24: 1-28), Job (Job 1:8), Paul (2 Cor 5: 17), Zechariah the husband of Elizabeth (Lk 1: 5-7), and Joseph the husband of Mary (Matt 1: 18-22, Matt 2: 13-15, Matt 2: 19-23). Be closer both to God and your family.
- 40. To Women:** You are the first evangelisers and witnesses to faith. Take care of your family and support one another. Pope Francis urges: **“...listen to sacred Scripture and then practice mercy... God’s word has the power to open our eyes and to enable us to renounce a stifling and barren individualism and instead to embark on a new path of sharing and solidarity.”**<sup>23</sup> We urge you to take some women in the Bible who listened and acted upon the Word of God as your role models; among them: Mary the Mother of Jesus (Lk 1: 26-38, Lk 2: 18-19, Elizabeth (Lk 1: 5-7), Jochebed the mother of Moses (Ex 6:20), Hannah the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 1) and Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42).
- 41. To the Family as a whole:** Let the Holy Family of Nazareth be your role model in the life of prayer, listening to the Word of God and doing His will (Lk 2: 22-28, Lk 2: 41- 50). In a special way, we urge every family to have a Bible and keep it in a worthy place for reading and prayer,<sup>24</sup> for “Prayer

---

<sup>20</sup>Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Christus Vivit*, to Young People and to the Entire People of God, Loreto, *The Shrine of the Holy House*, 25 March, 2019, #s31, 109.

<sup>21</sup> *Christus Vivit* (CV), #150.

<sup>22</sup> AI, #12.

<sup>23</sup> AI, #13.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. VD, #85, AI, #31.

should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together.”<sup>25</sup>

- 42. To Civic and Political Leaders:** The Synod Fathers at the First African Synod challenged “*the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain to guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples.*”<sup>26</sup> The message of the gospel is that, by grace through faith, people can be reconciled with God (Eph 2:7-8); for the Word of God transforms individuals and enables them to lead good lives. So, we are appealing to you to let the Word of God be your counsel and teacher of conscience. Jesus should be your role model, he says:

***The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But a hired man, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hired man flees because he is employed and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am I known by my own. ..I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; I also must bring them, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd ... (Jn 10: 1-29).***

43. Therefore, we encourage you to exercise your faith explicitly and your call diligently. Be a source of unity and reconciliation. Take after St. Thomas More, your patron. He was an English humanist, statesman and chancellor of England (1478 -1535) who was beheaded for standing for the truth against the powers that be. He was also conversant with the Holy Scriptures and Church teachings. He rose early in the morning and spent time in prolonged prayer and fasting. God remained the centre of his life.

- 44. To Catechists:** Your role in faith formation cannot be overemphasized. Heed to the command of the Lord: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matt 28: 19-20). Therefore, you catechists, too, in your ministry of helping people to grow in their faith, ought to feel an urgent need for personal renewal through familiarity with, and study of, the sacred Scriptures. **This will help you**

---

<sup>25</sup> DV, #25.

<sup>26</sup> EIA, #s 130-131.

**foster in your hearers a true dialogue with the Word of God.**<sup>27</sup> We urge you to emulate your patron saint in Africa, Andrew Kaggwa, one of the Ugandan Martyrs. He was a religious instructor and converted many others. He who was killed after refusing to denounce the Catholic faith.

**45. To those in Formation for the Priesthood and Religious Life:** The Word of God has power in itself to form. Open yourselves to the Word of God, more especially in the study of Holy Scripture, prayer and to the liturgy of the Hours.<sup>28</sup> Like Simon Peter and the first disciples, you are being called to listen to the Lord now; if you are to be successful in your future ministry: *“And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! **But at your word** I will let down the nets.’”*(Lk 5: 5). Once he obeyed Jesus, the Word made flesh, he caught fish in plenty. Therefore, you should say with the Psalmist: Lord *“your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119:105).

**46. To Consecrated men and women:** Your founders were inspired by the Word of God. As such, your charism is also motivated by the Word of God: *“...you are called to ‘live by faith in the Son of God’ (Gal 2: 20) and to love the word of God. Each day you nourish your mind and heart at the table of the word so richly provided by the Church in the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. This word of God moves you to praise God’s Name with joyful hearts and to obey his commands and counsel. It spurs you on to an ever more generous service of your people, in proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and leading the faithful in prayer.”*<sup>29</sup>

**47. To the Clergy:** You have been called and commissioned as ministers of the Word. The Word of God is at the core of your ministry. May the Word of God speak to your heart so that the people of God should not hunger for the Word of God. In addition, Pope Benedict XVI says that: *“**The synod fathers encouraged all pastors to promote times devoted to the celebration of the word in the communities entrusted to their care. These celebrations are privileged occasions for an encounter with the Lord. This practice will certainly benefit the faithful, and should be considered an important element of liturgical formation.**”*<sup>30</sup> Remember the words your Bishop addressed to you during the ordination to the Order of Deacons as the Book of the Gospels was placed in your hands: *“**Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become. Believe what you read; teach***

---

<sup>27</sup> AI, #5.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life *Directives, On Formation in Religious Institutes, 2 February 1990, 76.*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Journey to Korea, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands And Thailand: *Address to Religious Men and Women of Korea, Seoul, 5 May 1984.*

<sup>30</sup> VD, #65.

***what you believe; and practice what you teach”*** (Rite of Ordination for Deacons).

### **Questions for Reflection**

- 1) *In my state of life, how can I grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures?*
- 2) *As a Catholic, how can I improve my knowledge of the Bible?*

### **CONCLUSION**

*“With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments” (Ps 119:131).*

48. The Word of God must imbue all aspects of life. It must be the centre of all Church activities; the ministries to the youth and young people, catechetical, liturgical, sacred music<sup>31</sup>, the social teaching of the Church, education, biblical and health, among others.
49. Indeed, ***“Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary symbolises openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.”***<sup>32</sup> May the Mother of the Word made flesh and our Mother teach us to be docile to the Word of God and may she always intercede for us to be transformed by it; so that it becomes our way of life.
50. This Pastoral Letter is being presented on the **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the World Day for Consecrated Life**. It is our hope and prayer that it will draw a positive response and impel the Church in Zambia to venerate, celebrate, read, pray, study and share the Word of God. This year of the Word of God will be officially closed at the national level on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2020.

Issued at Kapingila ZCCB House on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020- *The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. VD, #70.

<sup>32</sup> VD, #27.



Signed by:

- + **Rt. Rev. George C.Z. Lungu**, *Bishop of Chipata and ZCCB President*
- + **Most Rev. Ignatius Chama**, *Archbishop of Kasama and ZCCB Vice President*
- + **Most Rev. Dr. Alick Banda**, *Archbishop of Lusaka & Apostolic Administrator of Ndola.*
- + **Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde**, *Bishop of Solwezi*
- + **Rt. Rev. Evans C. Chinyemba, OMI**, *Bishop of Mongu*
- + **Rt. Rev. Clement Mulenga, SDB**, *Bishop of Kabwe*
- + **Rt. Rev. Patrick Chisanga, OFM Conv**, *Bishop of Mansa*
- + **Rt. Rev. Moses Hamungole**, *Bishop of Monze*
- + **Rt. Rev. Justin Mulenga**, *Bishop of Mpika*
- + **Rt. Rev. Valentine Kalumba, OMI**, *Bishop of Livingstone*
- + **Rt. Rev. Dr. Benjamin Phiri**, *Auxiliary Bishop of Chipata*
- + **Most Rev. T.G. Mpundu**, *Archbishop Emeritus of Lusaka*
- + **Rt. Rev. Aaron Chisha**, *Bishop Emeritus of Mansa*
- + **Rt. Rev. Raymond Mpezele**, *Bishop Emeritus of Livingstone*

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

The Catechism of the Catholic Church: *Compendium*, Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2005.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, Libreria Editrice, Vaticana, 2000.

Pope Francis, *Aperuit Illis*, Apostolic Letter, 30 September, 2019.

Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Christus Vivit*, to Young People and to the Entire People of God, Loreto, *The Shrine of the Holy House*, 25 March, 2019.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, *Encyclical Letter on the Care for Our Common Home*, Libreria Editrice, 2015.

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: An Apostolic Exhortation*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2013.

Pope Benedict XVI, *The Word of the Lord: Post-Synodal Exhortation*, *Verbum Domini*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2010.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice, 2004.

John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: The Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the First Synod of Bishops for Africa*, Rome, 1994.

John Paul II, *Catechesis Today: An Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae*, Paulines Publications Africa Nairobi, 1979.

Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi an Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelisation in the Modern World*, Dec 8, 1977.

Pope Leo XIII, On the Study of Holy Scripture: *Providentissimus Deus*, November 18, 1893.

Pope Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter *Spiritus Paraclitus*, 1920.

Pope Pius XII, On Promoting Biblical Studies: *Divino Afflente Spiritu*, 30 September, 1943.

Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, 2014.

Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, January 6, 1994.

The Decree on Holy Scriptures of the Council of Trent, 1546.

Vatican I, the dogmatic constitution on the Catholic faith: *Dei Filius*, 24 April, 1870.

Vatican Council II, On Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*, 1964.

*The ZCCB Strategic Plan: 2017-2026*, Lusaka, Catholic Secretariat, 2016.



*THE SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD IS TO BE CELEBRATED EVERY YEAR  
ON THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME*