



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
PROMOTED BY THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 26 April 2019*

[Multimedia]

Your Eminences, Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

With the words of the Apostle Paul, I welcome you, who are “God’s beloved in Rome”, wishing “grace to you and peace” (Rom 1:7). I thank Cardinal Tagle for the greeting he addressed to me on your behalf. You have gathered on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the *Catholic Biblical Federation*. This jubilee will give you the opportunity to take stock of your ecclesial service and to confirm yourselves with regard to the commitment to spread the Word of God.

Your reflection has developed around two words: *Bible* and *life*. I too would like to say something to you about this inseparable pair. “The word of God is *living*” (Heb 4:12): it does not die nor does it age; it abides for ever (cf. 1 Pet 1:12). It stays young in the presence of all that passes away (cf. Mt 24:35), and protects from interior aging those who put it into practice. It is living and life-giving. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, loves to work through Scripture. Indeed, the Word brings God’s breath into the world, instils the Lord’s warmth in the heart. All academic contributions, the volumes that are published, are and cannot but be, at the service of this. They are as wood which, laboriously gathered and stacked, serve to heat. But like wood it does not produce warmth by itself, nor do the best studies. Fire is needed; the Spirit is needed so that the Bible may burn in the heart and become life. Thus good wood can be used to feed this fire. But the Bible is not a fine collection of sacred books to be studied; it is the *Word of life* to be sown, the gift that the Risen One asks be gathered and distributed so that there may be life in his name (cf. Jn 20:31).

In the Church, the Word is an irreplaceable *injection of life*. For this reason homilies are essential. Preaching is not a rhetorical exercise nor a collection of wise human adages: it would just be wood. It is instead the sharing of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:4), of the divine Word that has touched the heart of the preacher, who communicates that warmth, that anointing. Many words flow daily to our ears, transmitting information and providing various input; many, perhaps too many, to the point of often exceeding our ability to assimilate them. But we cannot renounce the Word of Jesus, the one Word of eternal life (cf. Jn 6:68), which we need each day. It would be beautiful to see “a new season of greater love for sacred Scripture on the part of every member of the People of God so that ... their personal relationship with Jesus” may be deepened (Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 72). It would be beautiful if the Word of God were to become “ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 174); the beating heart, which vitalizes the limbs of the Body. It is the Spirit’s desire to mould us as the “Word-formed” Church: a Church that does not speak by or of herself, but that has the Lord in her heart and on her lips, and daily draws from his Word. But the temptation is always that of proclaiming ourselves and of speaking of our dynamics, but in this way life is not transmitted to the world.

The Word gives life to each believer by teaching to *renounce* oneself in order to *proclaim* Him. In this sense it acts as a sharp-edged sword that, by plunging deeply, discerns thoughts and emotions, brings truth to light, wounds in order to heal (cf. Heb 4:12; Job 5:18). The Word leads to a paschal way of living: as seeds that in dying give life, as a grape that through being pressed gives wine, as olives that give oil after being crushed by the olive-press. Thus, by producing radical gifts of life, the Word vivifies. It does not leave us at peace, but challenges us. A Church that lives in listening to the Word is never satisfied with her own assurances. She is docile to the unpredictable novelty of the Spirit. She never tires of proclaiming, never gives in to disappointment, never stops fostering communion at every level, because the Word calls to unity and invites each one to listen to the other, each overcoming his or her own particularism.

Hence, the Church that is nourished by the Word lives to *proclaim* the Word. She does not talk at one but takes to the streets of the world: not because she likes them or because they are easy, but because they are places for proclaiming. A Church faithful to the Word spares no breath in proclaiming the *kerigma* and does not expect to be appreciated. The Divine Word, which comes from the Father and pours forth into the world, spurs her to the ends of the earth. The Bible is her best vaccine against withdrawal and self-preservation. It is God’s Word, not our own, and it diverts us from being at the centre; it protects us from self-sufficiency and triumphalism; it constantly calls us to come out of ourselves. The Word of God has a centrifugal force, not centripetal: it does not make one withdraw inward, but pushes outward, toward those it has not yet reached. It does not assure lukewarm comforts, because it is fire and wind: it is the Spirit who inflames the heart and moves horizons, expanding them with his creativity.

Bible and life: let us work hard so that these two words may embrace each other, so that one may never be without the other. I would like to conclude as I began, with an expression of the Apostle

Paul, who wrote near the end of a Letter: “Finally, brethren, pray”. Like him, I too ask you to pray. But Saint Paul specifies the reason for prayer: “that the word of the Lord may speed on” (2 Thes 3:1). Let us pray and let us work so that the Bible does not remain in the library among many books that speak about it, but may it travel swiftly through the streets of the world and to reach the people who await it where they live. I hope you may be good *bearers of the Word* with the same enthusiasm that we read in the Easter narratives these days, where everyone runs ahead: the women, Peter, John, the two of Emmaus.... They hasten to encounter and proclaim the living Word. I wholeheartedly wish this for you, thanking you for all that you do.