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Press Conference for the presentation of the first Sunday of the Word of God

At 11.30 this morning, at the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the first Sunday of the Word of God, to take place on Sunday 26 January 2020.

The speaker was Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization.

The following is Archbishop Fisichella's intervention during the conference:

Intervention of Archbishop Rino Fisichella

This coming 26 January the Sunday of the Word of God will be celebrated for the first time. It is an initiative that Pope Francis entrusts to all the Church to enable "the Christian community to set aside moments to reflect on the great importance of the word of God for everyday living" (*Aperuit illis*, 2). On 30 September last, on the 1600th anniversary of the death of Saint Jerome, the great scholar of Sacred Scripture and translator in Latin of the original texts, the Pope made public his Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis*, with which he instituted this *Sunday*. The coincidence of the date, was equivalent to a gesture of great attention to the vast world that has gathered around biblical studies and biblical exegesis, which in this year will give rise to a variety of events celebrating the figure and work of Saint Jerome.

At the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy, in the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, Pope Francis had already made an allusion to this when he wrote: "It would be beneficial if every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. It would be a Sunday given over entirely to the Word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and His people. Creative initiatives can help make this an opportunity for the faithful to become living vessels for the transmission of God's word" (*Misericordia et misera* 7). In fact, following Vatican Council II with *Dei Verbum*, and the Synod on the Word of God (2008) with the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, there have been many different pastoral initiatives in

the world aimed at placing knowledge, diffusion, reflection and study of the Sacred Scriptures at the centre.

Just to mention briefly, the *Week for learning to pray with the Bible*, promoted by the *Canção Nova* Community in Brazil, deserves to be known. Also in Brazil, 150,000 guides to the Bible will be distributed free of charge. In Argentina, in September, a Bible month will be organized. In Colombia, the Word of God is proposed to children via puppets, making them smile and reflect. In Venezuela, despite the crisis, a *diplomada* has been created to take care of the biblical inspiration of all pastoral work. In the United States, International Bible Day is celebrated in November; the American Bible Society, for its part, proposes the dissemination of the Bible, with particular attention to areas of poverty, making it accessible in different languages and formats. In relation to youth, the initiative announced in the celebration of the *Year of the Bible* is interesting, and which involves young people as key figures: *Together Generation*, in Washington in June, will be a combination of music, testimonies and readings. In the Philippines, the Minister of the Interior has called for a *National Bible Week* between the 20th and 26th of January, urging those who are in a position to do so to extend the week to the entire month. Also in the Philippines, for ten years now, the National Bible Quiz initiative has managed to involve the entire nation, under the sign of a biblical competition involving all Catholic schools in the country. The World Evangelical Alliance has proclaimed *AD 2020 World Year of the Bible*, inviting Christians and evangelical churches around the world to promote Bible reading throughout 2020. In Spain a magazine, *Biblia viva*, was created for the biblical animation of pastoral ministry. In Italy the Italian Bible Festival is now in its sixteenth edition, involves seven dioceses, and is intended to bring the Word to the world of culture.

It is for this reason that the Pope in his Letter *Aperuit illis* intended to “respond to the many requests I have received from the people of God that the entire Church celebrate, in unity of purpose, a Sunday of the Word of God” (*Aperuit illis*, 2). This Sunday of the Word of God, therefore, is a pastoral initiative of the New Evangelization, with the aim of reviving the responsibility which believers have in the knowledge of Sacred Scripture and in keeping it alive through a work of permanent transmission and understanding, capable of giving meaning to the life of the Church in the various conditions in which they find themselves.

The great ecumenical value which this Sunday possesses cannot go unnoticed. Pope Francis has established that it should always be celebrated on the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time of the Liturgical Year, which, as we can see, falls close to the Day of Dialogue between Jews and Catholics and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is not, of course, a mere temporal coincidence, but a choice which is intended to mark a further step in ecumenical dialogue, placing the Word of God at the very heart of the commitment which Christians are called to make every day.

As with the other initiatives of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, this one too has recourse to a characteristic logo, so that it may be taken as a space for catechesis that helps to understand the meaning of the celebration of this Sunday. As can be seen, a well-known biblical scene is represented: the journey of the disciples to the village of Emmaus (cf. *Lk 24: 13-35*), which at a certain moment along the way is approached by the Risen Jesus. The icon is the work of Sister Marie-Paul Farran, an Egyptian nun who spent her whole life in the Benedictine monastery of *Notre-Dame du Calvaire* in Jerusalem, who died last May, and was rendered graphically by Giordano Redaelli for the *Edizioni San Paolo*. It highlights many aspects that converge in the Sunday of the Word of God. One can note, first of all, the characters. Together with the Christ who holds in His hands the “scroll of the Book”, that is, the Holy Scripture that finds fulfillment in His person, there are the two disciples: Cleopas, as is explicitly written by Luke, and, according to some exegetes, his wife. Cleopas holds the stick in his hand, a sign of the pilgrimage; while his wife seems to touch Christ. The faces of both disciples are facing the Lord; the left hand of the woman indicates Christ Himself, to affirm that He is the fulfillment of the ancient promises and the living Word that must be proclaimed to the world; the left hand of Cleopas, instead, indicates the path that the disciples are required to follow in order to bring to all the good news of the Gospel. Next to the disciple is the star, a sign of evangelization that guides their steps and directs them towards the future as a permanent light. The dynamic of the movement is also to be observed: the feet express that they are on a journey, on their way to the places where they are to bear the proclamation of the risen Christ. The entire scene of the Logo, in short, recalls the very heart of the Sunday of the Word of God: the proclamation of the Risen Christ needs disciples that are not tired or idle, but rather dynamic in always finding new languages to allow Holy Scripture to be the living rule of the life of the Church.

It is good now to focus attention on Sunday, 26 January. Essentially, the initiatives, very simple, simply inaugurate a journey which in the coming years will be enriched by other experiences aimed above all at preparing the laity to assume the ministry of the *Lettorato* in order to recall the importance of proclaiming the Word of God in the liturgy, but at the same time entrusting to them, for example, the preparation of *lectio divina* or other forms of animation, diffusion and study of Sacred Scripture.

On the morning of Sunday 26, at 10.00, Pope Francis will preside over the Holy Eucharist in Saint Peter's Basilica. Free tickets for participation can be collected from the offices of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in Via della Conciliazione 5, Friday 24 and Saturday 25 January from 8:30 to 13:30 and from 15:00 to 17:30; Sunday 26 January from 7:00 to 9:00. The statue of Our Lady of Knock, Patroness of Ireland, will be placed on the papal altar for the occasion; it which will come specially from the Shrine accompanied by a large representation of the faithful, led by the Archbishop of Tuam, Bishop Michael Neary and the rector of the Shrine, Br. Richard Gibbons. The choir of the Shrine will alternate with the Sistine Chapel Choir in the animation of the Holy Eucharist.

The choice of this presence is almost obligatory for this Sunday. As we know, the apparition of the Virgin to Knock in 1879 is particularly evocative: the Virgin is accompanied by St. Joseph and the evangelist John indicating the altar on which the victorious Lamb reigns, as in the vision of the Apocalypse. The Virgin Mary in this apparition does not speak; she remains silent, as if to indicate the fundamental attitude before the mystery; and yet, the whole apparition "speaks", because in John it indicates the Gospel that we are obliged to make our own and the path that awaits us in view of the last times. At the centre is once again the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the beating heart of evangelization. At the beginning of the Mass, moreover, there will be the solemn enthronement of the Lectionary, used in all the sessions of the Second Vatican Council.

At the conclusion of the Eucharistic celebration, Pope Francis will make a symbolic gesture: he will give the Bible to forty people representing so many expressions of our daily life: from the bishop to the foreigner; from the priest to the catechists; from consecrated persons to the policeman and the Swiss guard; from the Ambassadors of the various continents to university teachers and primary and secondary school teachers; from the poor to the journalist; from the Gendarme to the prisoner serving life imprisonment in a state of semi-freedom; from families to Nicolò Zaniolo representing sportsmen. It will also be received by a representative of the Orthodox Churches and the Evangelical Communities. In short, everyone is entrusted with Sacred Scripture to indicate the attention that we are called to place on the Word of God, so that it does not remain a book in our hands, but rather becomes a continuous provocation for prayer, reading, meditation and study. This Sunday, he wants to inspire all Christians not to place the Bible like one of the many books on the shelf at home, perhaps covered with dust, but as an instrument that awakens our faith.

On leaving the Basilica, all those who have participated will be given a special edition of Sacred Scripture, published for the occasion and offered for the generosity of St Paul, to whom our deep gratitude goes. In order to prepare to celebrate this Sunday of the Word of God, a pastoral grant in Italian, already translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese and Polish and in English, available only online, has also been prepared for Parish priests and pastoral workers to use to find suitable ideas and tools for the animation of this day.

In the afternoon, in Piazza Navona, in the beautiful Church of Saint Agnes, from 16.00 to 19.00, many figures representing various groups will take turns in the continuous reading of the Gospel of Matthew. The choice of this Gospel depends on the fact that it is the Gospel that will be read on Sundays this year and, therefore, lends itself to being an introduction to the prayer and meditation of the faithful during 2020. This moment will be accompanied by the choir of the diocese of Rome. A special edition of the Gospel of Matthew has been published for the occasion and will be distributed to those present.

As Pope Francis wrote: "May the Sunday of the Word of God help His people to grow in religious and intimate familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures. For as the sacred author taught of old: "This word is very near to you: it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance" (*Dt* 30: 14) (*Aperuit illis*, 15)". A Sunday, then, through which we can rediscover who we are and what responsibility we have in the Church and in today's world.

