



# Living in the Word of God



## Pastoral Letter for the Archdiocese of Edmonton

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The Catholic  
Archdiocese  
of Edmonton

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*The purpose of this letter is to share with you a direction that I, together with many members of this Archdiocesan family, have discerned as good for us to follow in order to listen carefully to the Word of God and, in a shared commitment to be adequately formed in the faith, put it into practice.*

# Introduction

On May 10th, 1959, at just two weeks of age, I was taken by my parents to our parish church to be baptized. It is without question the best and most important action my mother and father ever undertook on my behalf. By the sacrament of Baptism, I was washed with the mercy of God the Father and given the gift of new life through a communion of love and friendship with his Son, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it brought me into the community of people who follow Jesus Christ as Lord and united me to them by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within all the baptized. With the passage of time my gratitude for being a member of the Church has steadily deepened. It is truly beautiful to be a Catholic.

What begins at Baptism is a way of life that is shaped by sacred teachings, strengthened by sacramental celebration, and marked by loving service of neighbour. When this life is fully embraced in faith, hope and charity, it bears within itself the promise of eternal life! Is it any wonder that I thank God often for the decision my parents made to have me baptized?

I recall this event in my own life because this is what Pope Francis frequently requests of us all. Often he asks people gathered with him in St. Peter's Square if they know the date of their Baptism. It is an important question. At Baptism, our life in Christ as members of his Church begins. It is an anniversary worthy of attentive recall and great celebration.

So, let us ask: “What does it mean to follow Jesus?” In fact, that question can be answered rather simply. It is a matter of listening and doing. An authentic disciple of Jesus Christ is one who first listens to his Word and then puts it into practice. From of old, obedient listening has been the distinctive mark of God’s people.

This was expressed simply and beautifully by the prophet Isaiah: “Morning by morning he awakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (*Isaiah* 50:4).

Now that God’s Word has become a human being in Jesus Christ, we listen with particular attention to the words spoken by the Saviour himself. Indeed, Jesus himself affirmed the centrality of hearing and practising his Word for all disciples.

In St. Luke we read: “*Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ But he said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it’*” (*Luke* 8:19-21).

Commenting upon this, Pope Francis said, “These are the two conditions in order to follow Jesus: to listen to the Word of God, and to put it into practice. This is the Christian life—nothing more.

**Simple, simple.**

Maybe we’ve made it a little difficult, with many explanations that no one understands, but the Christian life is thus: listening to the Word of God and practising it.” (Homily at Daily Mass, September 23, 2014)

## From the time he became our Holy Father, Pope Francis has stressed repeatedly the need for us to understand and accept what it means to be a baptized believer in Jesus Christ.

He speaks of this most often in terms of “discipleship”. Baptism makes us disciples, that is to say, people who know and love Jesus Christ and respond to his call to follow him. In particular, the Pope likes to stress that Baptism makes us missionary disciples, endowed with many gifts and talents for the service of others in the name of the Lord. If a person is baptized in infancy as I was, it is very easy to take for granted the wondrous gift bestowed by that sacrament. Pope Francis wants us to be fully aware of what it means to be baptized, to rejoice in the gift, and to embrace completely the Christian way of living.



# Listening to the Word of God

## Daily Attentiveness to the Word of God

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The hearing of Christ's Word demands a silent and attentive listening. This requires effort and determination. Living in a world of noise, we must be always cultivating, with the help of God's grace, an inner stillness in which we are disposed to hear and be transformed by the Word of God.

*St. Paul teaches that faith comes from what is heard (cf. Romans 10:17). This means that the first act of the disciple is to listen carefully to what God is saying to us in the words of Jesus.*

If this is not already our practice, I ask that each of us make time each day for a prayerful listening to the Word of God. We may wonder how, in the midst of many demands upon our time, this might be possible. This can be a particular challenge, especially for parents with infants and young children. However hectic our circumstances, Jesus invites

us to remember "the one thing necessary" is taking time to listen to him (cf. Luke 10:42).

Even if we take as little as ten minutes each day to read a few lines of the Bible, or one of the readings assigned for daily Mass, this encounter with Christ will change our lives.



## The Word of God in the Home

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I encourage families, too, to listen together to the Word of God. Through a careful listening to this Word, families encounter the Lord in their very midst and hear within the depths of their hearts his assurance of love and call to holiness and service. Here I suggest three simple ways by which our families can make the Word of God central to their daily living and draw from it guidance and peace.

### 1. Grace at mealtime

In line with a specific request of the Holy Father, I ask that all our families return to the beautiful practice of praying before and after meals (cf. *Laudato Si*, 227). Together with our traditional prayer to God for the blessing of the meal and our sharing of it, this can be an opportunity to hear a line from Sacred Scripture and respond to it.

### 2. Creation of a prayer space in the home

I recall from my days as a parish priest the practice of one family that created a “sacred space” in their home by

simply placing a candle in the corner of one room. They would gather daily around the lit candle to offer their spontaneous prayers to God for his blessing upon their day. Many families have similar practices. It is important that spouses find time and ways to pray together and that parents and children together do the same. The heart of that family prayer should be the Word of God, who speaks to us in the varied circumstances of our lives. Perhaps, in addition to a candle, a Bible could be “enthroned” on a stand or table. The Gospel of the day could be read, or included in the family’s prayers.

### 3. Family discussion of the Sunday homily

Central to the disciple’s rhythm of life is the Word proclaimed on Sunday at Mass. By means of the homily, the priest or deacon helps us understand the message of Sacred Scripture and apply it to our daily living. By what means do we carry that message forward into the events of our week? One way to do so is to make time as a family to discuss what was heard at Mass, and share together how each one will allow God’s Word to direct their thoughts and behaviours throughout the week.

## Listening to the Word of God with Fellow Disciples

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It is important to create opportunities for fellow disciples to gather and reflect deeply upon the Word of God. In this way we not only support one another as we grow in our relationship with Jesus, but also encourage one another to embrace the common mission that is ours in virtue of our Baptism into his Church.

# Putting the Word of God into practice



*Throughout the history of the Church, the Christian response to God's love revealed in Christ has been threefold: **worship, witness and service.** In these three ways we put into practice the Word of God.*

*These are the columns upon which the Christian life is sustained. From the beginning, the Church has responded in faith and obedience to the Word of God by offering worship to God alone, making known his love to others, and serving in Christian charity people in need.*

**Formation pertaining to each of these pillars will shape our pastoral priorities for the next three years.**

## This focus on formation is in direct response to the widespread request I have heard from the people of this Archdiocese.

It came forth from our participation in the global synodal process to which Pope Francis has called the entire Church.

We held, in the course of nearly one year, about 350 listening sessions, which generated over 4,000 responses. A rich variety of ideas, concerns, and hopes were voiced.

From among them all, one entreaty was made most frequently: the appeal for more formation in the faith.

In response to this call from God's people, the Archdiocese is entering what we can call "formation mode." For the next three years, our parishes will follow locally developed

programmes to help parishioners grow in their knowledge of our beautiful Catholic faith. Uniting all our efforts will be the common commitment to formation with respect to the three pillars of our Catholic life—worship, witness, and service—in accord with the specific focus I am designating for each of them.

## Worship

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In all of Scripture, the words of Jesus likely most familiar to Catholic ears are these: *"Do this in memory of me."* Spoken by the Lord at the Last Supper, these words have always been understood by the Church as his command to repeat in his memory what he did with his disciples the night prior to his crucifixion. This is why we gather for Sunday Mass, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and why the Church insists that doing so is a sacred obligation.

Yet, Christians respond to this command of the Lord not as a heavy and unwanted burden. **Rather, it is a joyful duty!** At Mass, enabled by the Holy Spirit we offer our lives to God the Father, through Jesus his Son, as an act of joyful praise and heartfelt thanksgiving for God's saving love. Through the reception of Holy Communion, we are nourished with the very Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus and thus receive from him all that we need for our life as his disciples. This is why disciples of Jesus have recognized from the early days of the Church that they cannot live without the Eucharist.

**Consequently, I have directed that, as our first pastoral priority, formation for worship give particular attention to the mystery of the Eucharist. Are we celebrating Mass worthily and well?**

Do we understand the reasons behind the rituals and gestures that form the liturgical action? Most importantly, do we hold fast in faith to the mystery of the Real Presence, the wondrous truth

that the simple gifts of bread and wine are fully transformed into the true body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ? Do we grasp why the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our entire Christian life, and how it impels us forward into our everyday participation in the mission of the Church?

The very heart of all worship is the sacrament of the Eucharist. Do we consciously make it the heart of our lives?

## Witness

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St. John writes these beautiful words at the beginning of his first letter:

*"We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1John 1:1-4).*

Here St. John is expressing what we know from experience to be true. When we have encountered Jesus Christ and been transformed by his mercy and love, we naturally want to tell others about it and invite them to be one with us in a community of joy!

**The making known to others of what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, and for each of us in our own individual lives, is what is meant by giving witness.**



The desire and ability to be witnesses to Christ is granted by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8), whom we have received in a particular way in the sacrament of Confirmation.

There are many ways we can put the Word of God into practice through the act of witnessing to Christ. The most effective is by the way we live our lives. People pay more attention to what we do than to what we say.

Yet, there are times when we are called upon to speak on the basis of our belief, particularly in those moments when people close to us, co-workers, or society in general take directions contrary to the teachings of our Lord.

**Formation for witness—our second priority—will have as its aim the development of confidence. We need to be confident in our grasp of the truths of our faith, and convinced of the beauty and rightness of the answers it proposes to the questions of the day.**

This will mean taking time to identify and articulate those queries—those of our contemporaries as well as our own—and understand well the response that arises from the Word of God and Tradition of the Church.

The Holy Spirit has been given that we might be witnesses. Let us call upon the Spirit to provide us with the ability to do so and thus put into practice the Word of God.

## Service

On the night of the Last Supper, after Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he taught that by this action he was giving us an example to follow, and then spoke this command:

*"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).*

Putting the Word of God into practice means serving our brothers and sisters in love. To love as Jesus loved means that we make sacrifices daily for the good of the other. This typically takes place by the gifts we make of time, talent and treasure. Let us consider this carefully and seriously. These are God's gifts to us to be used according to his purpose and in keeping with our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

There are many avenues for the expression of Christian charity. This Archdiocese has, in fact, a noble history of service in the name of Christ.

**For this period of formation in the Archdiocese, I ask that our third pastoral priority give particular attention to the service of marriage and family. These are under great strain, and our faith can form us well to give needed support.**

What does Jesus say about marriage? Why is the marital bond a sacrament, and how do we invite its grace to flow into the home to enliven, heal, and strengthen family life? Let us all be formed well in the Church's rich teaching on marriage and family in order to serve this vital cell of our Church and world.



## Mercy at the Heart of it all

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The disciple lives from the mercy of God. The Lord calls us precisely in our weakness, and mercifully bestows upon us all the gifts we need for the fulfillment of our Christian calling. Our need for mercy is especially clear as we strive to do God's Word through worship, witness and service. True worship, especially through celebration of the Eucharist, requires that we examine our way of living so as first to seek forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*).

Credible witness demands that we be healed of any sinful ways of living that do not correspond to what we profess to believe. Joyful service of others arises when God's mercy heals us of sin that closes us in upon ourselves.

**I invite each member of our Archdiocese to examine their practice of turning to God for mercy.**

**Let us each consider:  
When was the last time I went to confession?**

**How often do I seek the Lord's mercy in this wonderful sacrament?**



These are essential questions that every missionary disciple must ponder with great seriousness, because only by receiving God's mercy can we become its agents for others.

## The Beauty of Faith Expressed Through Art

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For Catholic Education Week 2024, all ten of our school divisions participated in the CAEDM Witness through Art event. Students were asked to articulate and express the beauty of our faith through art. With school division representatives, parents, and students present, Archbishop Smith blessed the student and their artwork. It now adorns the walls of the Pastoral Administration Office (PAO) Assembly Hall and five pieces were selected to be included in this Pastoral Letter. We take the opportunity to once again thank East Central Alberta, Edmonton, Evergreen, Elk Island, Greater St. Albert, Living Waters, Red Deer, Lloydminster and St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School Division and Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord francophone school division



*May the Blessed Mother help us with her prayers. Perfect disciple, she gave her complete surrender to God's Word in the expression of her fiat, "be it done". We call upon Mary to be our inspiration and guide as we are formed in faith to give our fiat to God's call to live as missionary disciples of his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

*In this letter we have considered together the call of Pope Francis to embrace fully the meaning of our Baptism and to live consciously as disciples of Jesus Christ. This means hearing the Word of God and practising it.*

As we move forward in response to this invitation of the Holy Father, it would be important to consider this one simple but urgent question: "Whose word do I, in fact, hear and follow?"

Many different voices speak words to us daily. Consider social media, artificial intelligence, television, radio, books, and magazines. We are putting those words into practice when we allow them to influence and shape our ways of thinking and living.

Yet, there is only one voice that we know is fully worthy of our trust. That is the voice of Jesus, who is the only one who speaks the words of eternal life (*cf. John 6:68*).

To be disciples, to live in accord with our Baptismal identity and dignity, is to allow only his words to guide and direct our lives. Let us take great care to hear only his Word, to turn away from any voice that leads us from him, and to put into practice that which he tells us. Then we shall know the joy of living as his brothers and sisters.



**Richard W. Smith**  
Archbishop of Edmonton

*This letter is an updated version of the original pastoral letter published on September 14, 2017*



We are a  
faith community  
that understands  
and joyfully  
celebrates  
the Eucharist.



We are a  
faith community  
confident in  
proclaiming the  
Great Story to  
our work and life  
communities.



We are a  
faith community  
that supports  
families, and  
recognizes  
marriage and  
family are  
the core of  
God's plan.