

HOMILY – 15TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – 16 JULY 2017

Walking along Princes Street in Edinburgh, you cannot fail to be impressed by the Scott Monument, this huge 150ft memorial to Sir Walter Scott, for doing what? For writing many novels, books and prose that captured the imagination of the time. It reminds us that one person can change minds, capture imagination, generate dreams. All by the power of the written word. Someone sitting down with a pen and paper, creating words that people want to read. Another modern example is JK Rowling (Harry Potter) or JR Tolkien (Lord of the Rings), who wrote fiction that generated millions of books, films and merchandise. In the 17th Century, it was William Shakespeare.

Why is this the case? Perhaps because what is written has power, substance, excitement and emotion. How do you decide what you choose to read? When did you last read a book? What was the most influential book in your lifetime? I guarantee that the one that will sustain all of us is the Holy Bible, even Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings and the 39 Steps have their day.

It is often said you are what you eat. But is it not more precise to say 'you are what you read'? Food nourishes the body but the written word nourishes the mind and the soul or if we read trash it can do the opposite and corrupt our minds or distort our view of reality.

For thousands of years, going back before Christ's incarnation, the Word made flesh, Jewish boys, especially, were expected to learn the Torah (Jewish law) and the Psalms, off by heart. At an early age, the Holy Scriptures were inculcated into their minds. They may not understand it at the time but through growth and maturity, it would never leave them. All directed by Scribes, Rabbis and Teachers.

The same sort of disciplinary parallels apply to Muslim boys and I think girls learning the Koran, off by heart. Psalm 64 and Isaiah 55, used at Holy Mass today, recognizes how the Holy Word of God, when it is heard, read and understood, is like rain coming on the earth, soaking into the soil and helping to produce a rich harvest.

Some of you here today, may remember your penny Catechism, from primary school or the poems that were drilled into you, by your teachers, they never leave you.

The important thing is that the Spirit of God is seeking to transform our minds and our conscience for the better, by the True Faith. Filling our minds with everything that is holy, sacred and life giving, rather than images and themes that are destructive, distressful or degrading.

Jesus, God, the Word made flesh, The Logos, is using parables to encourage us all to plant the seed of faith, deeply in the soil of God's word, taken to the spiritual centre of our existence. Notice how often Jesus say to his disciples – "Listen" or "Listen all those who have ears to hear". The Gospel writers and The Apostles are called to nourish the church with the living words of Jesus Christ.

True conversion to the Son of God is about consuming every word that comes from his mouth. When the prophet Ezekiel was called to be a Holy Prophet, God called on him to take the parchment scroll and eat it, in other words, to take the Word of God into our whole lives. Take our faith and make it the centre of our existence.

The truth is and you will probably not like me saying this, many Catholics and/or people who claim to be Catholic, appear to have little knowledge of the Gospels. Even asking some of them to name one of the

Gospel writers can be a bit of a challenge. It saddens me, in a way, when the family preparing for a funeral, just say to me, the priest, 'Oh you just choose the readings Father, we wouldn't know where to look in the Bible'. But having a photographic knowledge of the Bible isn't even necessarily the point. The key point for Jesus, in the Gospel today, remember that most people at the that time couldn't read or write, was to take Jesus, himself, the Word make flesh, into their lives. Not leave the seed among thorns and brambles). That through the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and truly listening to what Jesus has to say, that we are in tune with his teaching. In other words, that faith in Jesus Christ is changing or transforming my life for the better.

I would like to finish with a wee story. There was once a soldier in Spain. He was a big strong warrior who rode on a horse, dressed in armour. He was fighting in a battle one day against the Portugese, around 1580, when suddenly a cannonball was fired straight at him, from close range. Before he could move, it struck a glancing blow on his upper leg. He was in agony, his leg bloody and broken. He was taken to hospital and his leg was in a splint for weeks. He got terribly bored, lying in bed. The only books available were some love stories and the Holy Bible. Fed up, he reluctantly picked up the Holy Bible and start to read the Gospels. He was set on fire by what he read, so much so, he gave up being a soldier and started a Religious Order, the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus, now the biggest Priestly order in the world. Now, that was a good example of the Seed of Faith, planted in rich soil. Bringing hope for the Kingdom of God.

You can do the same, if you take God's Word to heart.

Amen