

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
A Reflection on Word Power

by Ray Glennon
January 10, 2010

A Prayer Before Giving a Presentation

Creator of all things, true source of light and wisdom, origin of all being, graciously let a ray of your light penetrate into the darkness of my understanding. Take from me the double darkness in which I have been born, an obscurity of sin and ignorance. Give me a keen understanding, a retentive memory, and the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally.

Grant me the talent of being exact in my explanations and the ability to express myself with thoroughness and charm.

Point out the beginning, direct the process, and help in the completion. I ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

— St. Thomas Aquinas

A Reflection on Word Power

At our parish church we have a Franciscan priest who helps out regularly. He begins all his homilies in the same way—“My friends, may God give you peace.” That is my wish for the Mother of God community tonight.

It is humbling to be asked to give a brief reflection on what the Word Power conference meant to me. Preparing for this talk called me to prayer in a way that was very meaningful to me. For me it is like getting ready for a Confirmation small group meeting. It means pulling out lots of books, searching the Internet, creating a huge file of notes, and following where the Lord leads me. It is always rewarding for me and I thank God for the opportunity to prepare this reflection. My hope is that I may be able to share with you some of the insights that I gained in my prayer time. And to do so in the allotted fifteen minutes.

Chapter 1 in a little remembered book published in 1991 opens this way—

Washington is a town whose only industry is the making, shaping, processing, and marketing of words. Words to define how citizens should conduct themselves. Words to direct and limit industry. Words to calm friends and warn enemies. Words to throw at one another in the halls of Congress or in front of

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devouring cameras. Words that in the end can kill, or impoverish, or imprison, or empower. And also recycled words—on editorial pages or inside pages of legal briefs—dissecting other words, assessing implications, making distinctions, arguing their true meaning as if the words were holy writ. Words without poetry or music, whose mastery brings money and authority.

Something to Die For by James Webb, © 1991, page 11, Opening of Chapter 1

Nineteen hundred years earlier Chapter 1 another book opened in a similar way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.... (John 1:1-5)

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him. (John 1: 14,18)

The first book is the novel *Something to Die For*, written by Jim Webb, then former Secretary of the Navy and now the senior Senator from Virginia. The second, of course, the Gospel of St. John. In the first we find the “words” of Washington and the world, in the second, the “word of God.”

Jim Webb is writing about the capital city in the most powerful nation on earth. It is the city of the West Wing, Capitol Hill, and the K Street lobbyists. It is a city where the powerful vie for attention and influence and the humble are left voiceless. It is a city where the powerless are overlooked, and the weakest of all, unborn children, are left unprotected.

St. John tells us of the Word and how the Word was made flesh—the mystery of the Incarnation. It is in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that we learn that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town in a remote province ruled by but far from the most powerful city on earth. He was born of humble parents in the most humble of settings and his first visitors were simple shepherds. And unlike modern Washington, last Sunday we celebrated the rich and powerful that came bearing gifts for the humble.

Two strikingly different views of “Word Power.” Jim Webb presents “words” as the way to obtain what the world values—money and power. St. John introduces “the Word” as the light of the world who gave the power to become children of God to those who believe in his name.

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According to the glossary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition (CCC) the Word of God is the entire content of Revelation as contained in the Holy Bible and proclaimed in the Church. (CCC p. 903) Scott Hahn writes that it is the Word of God through whom all things were created in the beginning, through whom the face of God was revealed in the flesh of Jesus Christ, and through whom God's new covenant is witnessed to in the inspired texts of Scripture and made present in the divine liturgy. *Covenant and Communion, The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* by Scott W. Hahn, © 2009, p. 13-14).

This is Word Power— The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. (*Dei Verbum*, 17)

The letter to the Hebrews begins this way. "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe." (Hebrews 1:1-2) St. John of the Cross wrote that "In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he (God) spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say ..." (CCC 65) God has no more to say. Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ. Now that is Word Power.

The Church also teaches that even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit or fully illuminated; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (CCC 66) Christianity is not a "religion of the book" or a written and mute word, but a belief in the Word of God which is incarnate and living. Therefore, "If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures." (CCC 108) So we are called to pray, read Scripture, and open our hearts to the Word of God

Jesus Christ is the unique Word of Sacred Scripture. St. Augustine wrote, "You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time. (CCC 102)

Simply stated, Jesus is the Word of God.

St. John tells us that at Capernaum Jesus said to the crowd,

"Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to

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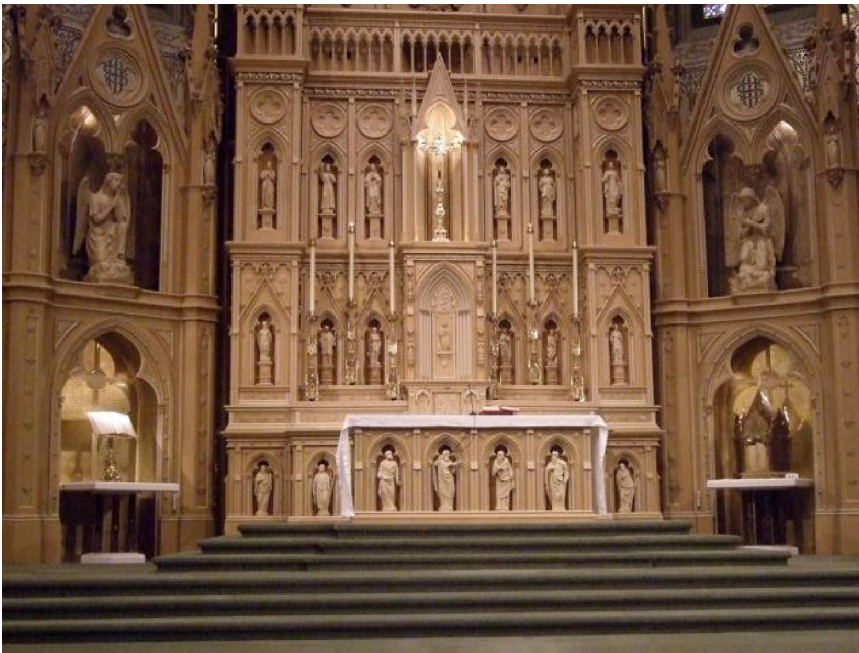
him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. (John 6:32-36)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:51, 57-58)

Jesus is the Word of God; And Jesus is the Bread of Life.

The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body. (CCC 103)

It is one thing to read this in the Catechism. It had a much greater impact on me when I saw it myself several years ago when I was in Montreal on business.



Main Altar, St. Patrick's Basilica, Montreal

In this photograph we can see the Word of God in all its majesty. Scripture and Eucharist—food for our journey—the bread of life.

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So, in a very profound way, Word Power is Jesus Power.

And for me, that revelation is changing my life. As I have said before, I am a life-long traditional Catholic and I have been actively involved in parish activities since my childhood. God and His Church have always been at the center of my life. But I did not have a truly personal relationship with Jesus Christ until I met Dawn and we began coming to Mother of God. It is a blessing beyond measure. As we have proclaimed again and again—Jesus is Alive. Jesus is Alive.

Let's circle back to our two books. In Jim Webb's story, a battle-hardened Marine Corps Colonel, a Marine's Marine all too knowledgeable in the ways of Washington, is the Commanding Officer of Marine Expeditionary Force en route to the Red Sea to fight a battle resulting from political calculation, opportunism, deceit, and the arrogance of power. Looking ahead to the conflict, he tells the Admiral, "If we are going to fight an armored column of Cubans in the desert it's going to cost us. And I'd like to tell my men that the price they're going to pay is worth it. That it's important to the country. Vital. *Something to die for.*" And, in the end, it wasn't.

St John tells us that after Jesus' Bread of Life discourse many of his followers left because the teaching was hard to accept. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:67-68)

Words of the World. The Word of God. We have a choice.

Today we celebrated the Baptism of the Lord. After Jesus was baptized, a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) The Word of God heard God's word.

But Jesus also heard the words of the world. Immediately after being baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil

Henri Nouwen has observed that Jesus faced three temptations in the desert: to be relevant—turning stones into bread; to be popular—jumping from the tower and have angels catch him; to have power to possess all the land. (*Beloved, Henri Nouwen in Conversation*, Henri J. M. Nouwen with Philip Roderick © 2007, p. 12)

These are the same temptations—relevance, popularity, and power—that we all confront in the world today.

What would Jesus do? What did Jesus do?

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Jesus refused all that Satan offered because Jesus didn't have to prove to anybody he was loveable. He was already the beloved—it was proclaimed at his baptism. (Nouwen, p. 12)

Well, so are we. We are beloved. Created in the image and likeness of God, and brothers and sisters of Jesus, through our baptism we became the beloved—and just like Jesus, we don't need to prove it either. We can choose life.

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Let me close with a word from Henri Nouwen that may also be a word for Mother of God Community.

The Christian community is a community of people who remind each other who they truly are -- the beloved of God. And everything around us is trying to tell me that it is not true. This is a big, big battle. That's what we call the spiritual battle. This is not just sweet things, its the fight for your identity. (Nouwen, p. 20)

We each have Word Power. It is the ability to choose the words that define our lives. We can listen to the words of the world and choose to live in darkness, or we can claim our belovedness by following the Word of God on the path to eternal life. Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, be with me and the Mother of God community, today and always.

May God give you peace.