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## Pope Francis: “It is the antidote to our fear of having to face life alone”

The Word of God “is the antidote to our fear of having to face life alone”, assures **Pope Francis** in his homily for Sunday of the Word of God Holy Mass, read by Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, who celebrated the liturgy in St. Peter’s Basilica. The Holy Father was not present because of a flare up of his sciatica condition that prevented him from leading the New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day services. “Let us not ignore God’s word”, is the Pope’s appeal, along with a concrete proposal: “turn off the television and open the Bible, turn off the cell phone and open the Gospel.” *“Before all else, we must believe and proclaim that God has drawn near to us, that we have been forgiven and shown mercy”*, Francis said: “by his word the Lord consoles us, that is, he stands ‘with’ (con-) those who are ‘alone’ (soli). In speaking to us, he reminds us that he has taken us to heart, that we are precious in his eyes, and that he holds us in the palm of his hand.” “God is close to us”, and that closeness is the very first message of the Gospel, the refrain of all Jesus’ preaching: “The time of his distance ended when, in Jesus, he became man. Ever since then, God has been very close to us; he will never retire from our human condition or tire of it.” Thanks to Jesus’ closeness “we can no longer distance ourselves from God and from others, the time when we could live thinking only of ourselves is now over”, Francis said:

**“To do so is not Christian, for those who experience God’s closeness cannot ignore their neighbours or treat them with indifference.”**

That’s why “those who hear God’s word are constantly reminded that life is not about shielding ourselves from others, but about encountering them in the name of God who is near. The word sown in the soil of our hearts, leads us in turn to sow hope through closeness to others. Even as God has done with us.” *“No one is far from God’s heart”*, the Pope assures, noting that Jesus’ first words are to Galilean fishermen: “simple folk who lived by harsh manual labour, by day and night. They were no experts in Scripture or people of great knowledge and culture. They lived in a region made up of various peoples, ethnic groups and cults: one that could not have been further from the religious purity of Jerusalem, the heart of the country. Yet that is where Jesus began, not from the centre but from the periphery.” **“Everyone can receive his word and encounter him in person”**, Francis writes: “Jesus speaks of God in the heart of society, to everyone, wherever they find themselves. He does not speak at fixed times or places, but ‘walking along the shore’, to fishermen who were ‘casting their nets’. He speaks to people in the most ordinary times and places.” In fact Jesus does not appeal to the disciples “using lofty words and ideas, but spoke to their lives. He told fishermen that they were to be fishers of men.” The Lord does the same with us: *“He looks for us where we are, he loves us as we are, and he patiently walks by our side. As he did with those fishermen, he waits for us on the shore of our life. With his word, he wants to change us, to invite us to live fuller lives and to put out into the deep together with him.”* *“let us not ignore God’s word”*, the final appeal: “It is a love letter, written to us by the One who knows us best. In reading it, we again hear his voice, see his face and receive his Spirit. That word brings us close to God. Let us not keep it at arm’s length, but carry it with us always, in our pocket, on our phone. Let us give it a worthy place in our homes. Let us set the Gospel in a place where we can remember to open it daily, perhaps at the beginning and at the end of the day, so that amid all those words that ring in our ears, there may also be a few verses of the word of God that can touch our hearts.” “To be able to do this – is the Pope’s proposal - let us ask the Lord for the strength to *turn off the television and open the Bible, to turn off our cell phone and open the Gospel.* During this liturgical year, we are reading Saint Mark, the simplest and the shortest of the Gospels. Why not read it at home too, even a brief passage each day. It will make

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us feel God's closeness to us and fill us with courage as we make our way through life."

M.Michela Nicolais