

- **Recommended Reading** - Suggestions for great reading materials
- **Thoughtful Questions** - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

AS IT IS WRITTEN (Mark 1:2)

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"Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours."

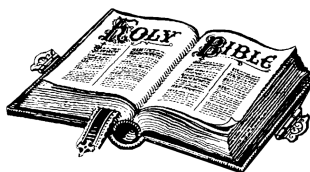
(2 Thessalonians 2:15)

Last month we spoke of the "Deposit of Faith" and how important Sacred Tradition is to us as Catholics. In this edition we will look more closely at Sacred Scripture, the other facet of the Deposit. What importance does the Church place on Scripture and what part should it play in our life of faith? We will begin our search with a quote from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

"The Church forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'" (St. Jerome) (CCC 133)

Could it be any clearer? Forcefully and specifically . . . all the Christian faithful. I think that means you and me and every other baptized Christian we know! So have you picked up your Bible lately? But why does the Church give us such a strong directive? Could it be because "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2Tim3:16-17) Or as St. Jerome expressed, to know Christ we must be in touch with and come to know Scripture. Or maybe as the catechism also says in paragraph 107 "...we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully,

and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures." In other words, Scripture is God speaking to each one of us. He has inspired the writers to put down exactly what He wanted to tell us "for the sake of our salvation". As Vatican II tells us: " For in the sacred



books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word

of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life." (Dei Verbum) How could we not open up such great a gift and use it as God intended as food for our soul?

Now that we understand how important it is to read Scripture, how can we ensure that our reading will be fruitful and our understanding of it correct? To begin with, let's go back to Vatican II and Dei Verbum (the constitution on Divine Revelation). "...And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying." (Dei Verbum 25). This tells us that Scripture must be read in a spirit of prayer and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it.

The Church has also given us three very important criteria for interpreting Sacred Scripture. First, we must be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture." We need to look at the

big picture and not misinterpret by pulling verses out of context. Secondly, we must read the Scripture within "the living Tradition of the Church." In other words, we aren't reinventing the wheel here. The Church has given us sound interpretations over the centuries and continues to guide us in understanding the meaning and purpose of particular passages. Lastly, we must be attentive to the analogy of faith. By "analogy of faith" we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation. Our interpretations need to fit and make sense when looking at all of salvation history. In the end, however, "...all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God."(CCC 119) The buck stops with the Magisterium, the Pope united with the Bishops. They have the final say.

There is much more to be said concerning the reading and praying of Sacred Scripture, so we will continue to explore this topic next month and look at the different "senses of Scripture". In the meantime, open up God's word to you! If this is something new for you, try beginning with the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles and in the words of St. Paul "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col 3:16)

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THE CHURCH SPEAKS - SACRED TRADITION

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)

Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, a word which is "not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living." 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)

"Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit." (CCC 81)

"It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list

of the sacred books. This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New." (CCC 120)

"All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, 'because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ' (Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2, 8)" (CCC 134)

Thoughtful Questions

Does Sacred Scripture have a place in my daily prayer life?

Could I explain to someone why Sacred Scripture is so important and what role it plays in the Church?

Do I recognize the wealth of Scripture that is contained in the prayers of the Mass, as well as the liturgy of the Word?

SCRIPTURE ON SCRIPTURE

"In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all (the) flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph 6:16-17)

"Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but

these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31)

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105)

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the field. The grass withers, and the flower wilts,

but the word of the Lord remains forever.' That word is the good news which was preached to you." (1 Pet 1:23-25)

Recommended Reading

Dei Verbum

"The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" from Vatican II

Inside the Bible

By Kenneth Baker, S.J.

This is a great book to accompany your Bible. It has helpful introductions for each book of the Bible.

A Father Who Keeps His Promises

By Scott Hahn This is a great book to help you understand the whole of Scripture and God's saving plan!