

Sacred Scripture and the Christian Life



A Short Study

INTRODUCTION

As we near the conclusion of the Year of Faith called for by Pope Benedict XVI, we are invited to further reflect on the graces and gifts bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit through our Catholic faith – especially those ways in which we draw closer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through Sacred Scripture.

This “short study,” ideal for individuals or small faith groups, is designed for Catholics who wish to deepen the “warm and living love for scripture” recommended by the bishops at Vatican Council II. It offers reflection questions based on short excerpts from the council, as well as subsequent Church Documents, that outline the integral role of Sacred Scripture in the life of faith.

May God, the Father of the Word, bless you in your journey of faith.

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SACRED SCRIPTURE AND THE LITURGY

Selections from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)

No. 7: ...Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross", but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

No. 24: Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony.

No. 35: That the intimate connection between words and rites may be apparent in the liturgy:

- 1) In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable.
- 2) Because the sermon is part of the liturgical service, the best place for it is to be indicated even in the rubrics, as far as the nature of the rite will allow; the ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources, and its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ, ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy.

...

- 4) Bible services should be encouraged, especially on the vigils of the more solemn feasts, on some weekdays in Advent and Lent, and on Sundays and feast days. They are particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available; when this is so, a deacon or some other person authorized by the bishop should preside over the celebration.

Questions for Reflection

The Council Fathers tell us that “it is [Christ] Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.” How are you aware of Christ’s presence when the readings are proclaimed at Mass?

What is the best homily or reflection on Sacred Scripture you ever heard?

Have you ever attended a “bible service” as described in no. 35 of *Dei Verbum*? What was it like? How did it draw you closer to God?

SACRED SCRIPTURE AND THE CHURCH

Selections from the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*)

No. 21: ...like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. 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.

No. 22: ...since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books.

No. 25: Therefore, [the faithful] should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. 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."

Questions for Reflection

Do you have a favorite passage or book of the Bible?
What is it?

How could your parish make Sacred Scripture more accessible

- to the faithful?
- to families?
- to non-believers?

How could you help?

How have you prayed with Sacred Scripture in the past? What were the fruits of your prayer?

SACRED SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

Selections from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (*Verbum Domini*)

No. 86: *[T]he privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist, in which, as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst. In some sense the prayerful reading of the Bible, personal and communal, must always be related to the Eucharistic celebration. Just as the adoration of the Eucharist prepares for, accompanies and follows the liturgy of the Eucharist, so too prayerful reading, personal and communal, prepares for, accompanies and deepens what the Church celebrates when she proclaims the word in a liturgical setting.*

No. 87: The documents produced before and during the Synod mentioned a number of methods for a faith-filled and fruitful approach to sacred Scripture. Yet the greatest attention was paid to *lectio divina*, which is truly “capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God”... It opens with the reading (*lectio*) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: *what does the biblical text say in itself?* Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. Next comes meditation (*meditatio*), which asks: *what does the biblical text say to us?* Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself

be moved and challenged. Following this comes prayer (*oratio*), which asks the question: *what do we say to the Lord in response to his word?* Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us. Finally, *lectio divina* concludes with contemplation (*contemplatio*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves *what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?*

No. 88: Mindful of the inseparable bond between the word of God and Mary of Nazareth, along with the Synod Fathers I urge that Marian prayer be encouraged among the faithful, above all in life of families, since it is an aid to meditating on the holy mysteries found in the Scriptures. A most helpful aid, for example, is the individual or communal recitation of the Holy Rosary, which ponders the mysteries of Christ's life in union with Mary, and which Pope John Paul II wished to enrich with the mysteries of light...

The Synod also recommended that the faithful be encouraged to pray the Angelus. This prayer, simple yet profound, allows us "to commemorate daily the mystery of the Incarnate Word"... In the Angelus we ask God to grant that, through Mary's intercession, we may imitate her in doing his will and in welcoming his word into our lives. This practice can help us to grow in an authentic love for the mystery of the incarnation.

Questions for Reflection

Consider the relationship between Eucharistic adoration and prayerful reading of scripture. How can you better prepare to hear the Word of God proclaimed on Sunday?

Are you familiar with *lectio divina*? If so, what has been your experience with this type of prayer?

How has a connection with the Blessed Virgin deepened your connection to Sacred Scripture? What Marian prayers do you find especially helpful in recalling the mysteries found in Sacred Scripture?

SACRED SCRIPTURE AND CATECHESIS

Selections from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

No. 4: The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

No. 75: A suitable catechesis is provided by priests and deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

No. 79: Among the rites belonging to the period of the catechumenate, then, celebrations of the word of God... are foremost.

No. 81: These celebrations of the word are: first, celebrations held specially for the catechumens; second, participation in the liturgy of the word at the Sunday Mass; third, celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction.

No. 82: The special celebrations of the word of God arranged for the benefit of the catechumens have as their main purpose:

1. to implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving: for example, the morality characteristic of the New Testament, the forgiving of injuries and insults, a sense of sin and repentance, the duties Christians must carry out in the word;
2. to give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer;
3. to explain to them the signs, celebrations, and seasons of the liturgy;
4. to prepare them gradually to enter the worship assembly of the entire community.



Questions for Reflection

Why do you think the Church places such an importance on the role of Sacred Scripture in catechesis?

If, as the Church tells us, the baptismal catechumenate is the inspiration for all catechesis (*General Directory for Catechesis*; see no. 90), how can catechetical programs for children and adults be enriched by greater use of Sacred Scripture?

Review the purposes of celebrations of the word in no. 82. How has reading Sacred Scripture helped you achieve these four ends?

Other Resources

Timothy R. Carmody, *Reading the Bible: A Study Guide* (Paulist Press, 2004)

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Jesus, the Revelation of the Father's Love: What the New Testament Teaches Us* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010)

Joe Paprocki, *Practice Makes Catholic: Moving from a Learned Faith to a Lived Faith* (Loyola Press, 2011)

Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (1995)

Fr. Christian Raab, OSB, *A Guide to Lectio Divina* (Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 2009)

Edward Sri, *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass Study Program* (Ascension Press, 2011)





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