

## Does/Did the Catholic Church Forbid the Reading of the Bible?

### In three parts:

- 1) Introductory Comments
- 2) Pope Leo XIII's On the Study of Holy Scripture
- 3) Multiple Quotes from Popes and Councils

You and I have both heard the myth: “The Catholic Church has forbidden Catholics from reading the Bible!”

I am not intending to say that Catholics, especially in the United States were always big Bible readers in the past. Certainly there was a deficit in this area — and a certain shyness coming from the problems of Protestantism and their Bible-thumping ways.

But it is a MYTH that Catholics did not read the Bible until the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century — until after Vatican II. Those who could read (many could not read over the centuries and even today ½ the world's population is effectively illiterate) did read the Bible when they had them.<sup>1</sup> Catholic biblical scholarship did not begin with Pius XII. It seems almost ludicrous to have to say that since we Catholics have had the best and the brightest of biblical scholars long before modern times — just consider Origen, Tertullian, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Thomas Aquinas just to mention a few.

There has been a very long history of Bible reading, study and scholarship stretching back to the beginning of Christian/Catholic history. Pope Leo XIII makes a good summary of this in his Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in the year 1893 which is a marvelous overview on the study of Sacred Scripture (see below).

Of course the Bible as an entire book was not easily available until the printing press was invented in the 16<sup>th</sup> century....but then ownership took off.

In practice (not in official Catholic teaching) after the inception of Protestantism there was a shying away from reading the Bible privately at least at certain

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<sup>1</sup> The first century did not have a New Testament because it was not yet written completely. The second and third century did not have a New Testament because the Councils of the Catholic Church had not yet defined and codified the collection of the canon of accepted books. From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century Christians could not own their own Bibles due to the prohibitive cost. It would cost roughly three years wages since it had to be written out by hand on expensive velum before paper and the printing press were invented. Even after that point more than ½ of the world's population could not read. Even today, as I recall hearing, ½ of the world cannot read, even in Detroit!

points...in particular areas. Protestants promoted the reading and interpreting of the Bible by each individual. When they did this outside the protective bounds and tradition of the Church, many came up with the most ignorant and self-serving interpretations imaginable. Even Luther said that there were as many theologies as there were heads.

People hesitated to read the Bible for fear of becoming like the looney sects morphing in every direction — all claiming to have the correct interpretation of Scripture. Many opted to listen to the reading and teaching of the Scriptures in the Church where they knew it was being correctly read and understood.

But a careful study of the past shows that the Church DID encourage the reading of Sacred Scripture. (Even if some or many who were in the trenches of Catechesis did not personally echo such a call ...for fear of Protestantism, etc)

A few examples:

The laity were more than encouraged to read the Bible; they were urged and exhorted to read it by Pope Pius VI in 1778 and again by Pius VII in 1820.

In the 1890's we have *Providentissimus Deus* issued by Pope Leo XIII in which he writes such things as:

“The calm and fair consideration of what has been said will clearly show that the Church has never failed in taking due measures to bring the Scriptures within reach of her children, and that she has ever held fast and exercised profitably that guardianship conferred upon her by Almighty God for the protection and glory of His holy Word...” Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus, On the Study of Sacred Scripture*, 1893

And we have him establishing an indulgence in December 13 1898 for reading the Gospels at least 15 minutes a day, and a Plenary Indulgence once a month for the daily reading of the Gospel

Pope St. Pius X stated: “Nothing would please us more than to see our beloved children form the habit of reading the Gospels – not merely from time to time, but every day.”

Pope Benedict XV wrote in *Spiritus Paraclitus* in 1920

“Our one desire for all the Church’s children is that, being saturated with the Bible, they may arrive at the all-surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ”  
(Pope Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus, On the Centenary of the Death of St. Jerome*, 1920).

And in the same work wrote when founding the Society of St. Jerome:

“The object of this Society is to put into the hands of as many people as possible the Gospels and Acts, so that every Christian family may have them and become accustomed to reading them. This we have much at heart, for we have seen how useful it is. We earnestly hope, then, that similar Societies will be founded...Commendation too, is due to Catholics in other countries who have published the entire New Testament, as well as selected portions of the Old in neat and simple form so as to popularize their use. Much again must accrue to the Church of God when numbers of people thus approach this table of heavenly instruction which the Lord provided through the ministry of His Prophets,, Apostles and Doctors for the entire world.”

Some have pointed out that with Pius XII there were certainly new things afoot but prior to 1943 there was much study and use of Sacred Scripture down through the centuries as Leo XIII summarized in 1893. And there was even the use of historical methods using archeology, etc. in modern times prior to 1943. An example of such was the work done by Lagrange who founded the Biblical School *Ecole Pratique d'Etudes Bibliques* in 1890 and founded the *Journal Revue Biblique* (International Biblical Review) in 1892 to promote “critical” study of the Bible. He published some fine works on the Gospels in 1911, 1920, and 1925 among other things. In 1902 he was made a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission founded by the Pope. He died in the 1930’s. He had the blessing of Pope Leo XIII who approved his Biblical School in 1892 – which was well before 1943.

So why is this such a bee in my bonnet and in that of an educated Catholic?

Besides being simply true I desire that Catholics not feel inferior to Protestants in regards the Bible. I am fighting to kill the nefarious myth. I desire that Catholics realize that the Bible is THEIR book and to know the very rich history of the love of the Bible and scholarship regarding the Bible that has always been taught and expressed by the Catholic Church. They need to realize that just because they did not find serious Bible Study in the culture they grew up in, in their little corner of the world that the Church did not suddenly discover the Bible in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nor did it decide to promote Scripture reading only after the Second Vatican

Council (where of course it was promoted big time) or even Pius XII. That there is a very rich history of Bible reading in the Catholic Church — even if they did not experience it growing up in the 1950's — is real and provable. One cannot take their own limited personal experience and declare that Catholics simply did not read the Bible until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Myth-makers need to face the facts and review history in an honest and fair manner. The myth is a myth and history proves this without a doubt.

Of course too we must realize that it is our Book, or rather, our “Library of books” — full of history, poetry, proverbs, etc. It was formed by the Holy Spirit within the Church and thus to be read within the Church as her family heirloom. It is to be read both liturgically and personally (not departing from the teaching of the Church or how the Church reads it of course).

So that as Christians we may know and love and follow Jesus Christ for as St. Jerome wrote so long ago: “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

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**PROVIDENTISSIMUS DEUS  
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII  
ON THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE**

Excerpt: (I am not giving her the whole of what follows..but parts ...I did not save it though...so I give you the whole of the excerpt for your edification)

Holy Scripture Most Profitable To Doctrine and Morality

3. Among the reasons for which the Holy Scripture is so worthy of commendation - in addition to its own excellence and to the homage which we owe to God's Word - the chief of all is, the innumerable benefits of which it is the source; according to the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost Himself, who says: "All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work."(6) That such was the purpose of God in giving the Scripture of men is shown by the example of Christ our Lord and of His Apostles. For He Himself Who "obtained authority by miracles, merited belief by authority, and by belief drew to Himself the multitude"(7) was accustomed in the exercise of His Divine Mission, to appeal to the Scriptures. He uses them at times to prove that He is sent by God, and is God Himself. From them He cites instructions for His disciples and confirmation of His doctrine. He vindicates them from the calumnies of objectors; he quotes them

against Sadducees and Pharisees, and retorts from them upon Satan himself when he dares to tempt Him. At the close of His life His utterances are from Holy Scripture, and it is the Scripture that He expounds to His disciples after His resurrection, until He ascends to the glory of His Father. Faithful to His precepts, the Apostles, although He Himself granted "signs and wonders to be done by their hands"(8) nevertheless used with the greatest effect the sacred writings, in order to persuade the nations everywhere of the wisdom of Christianity, to conquer the obstinacy of the Jews, and to suppress the outbreak of heresy. This is plainly seen in their discourses, especially in those of St. Peter: these were often little less than a series of citations from the Old Testament supporting in the strongest manner the new dispensation. We find the same thing in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John and in the Catholic Epistles; and most remarkably of all in the words of him who "boasts that he learned the law at the feet of Gamaliel, in order that, being armed with spiritual weapons, he might afterwards say with confidence, 'The arms of our warfare are not carnal but mighty unto God.'"(9) Let all, therefore, especially the novices of the ecclesiastical army, understand how deeply the sacred Books should be esteemed, and with what eagerness and reverence they should approach this great arsenal of heavenly arms. For those whose duty it is to handle Catholic doctrine before the learned or the unlearned will nowhere find more ample matter or more abundant exhortation, whether on the subject of God, the supreme Good and the all-perfect Being, or of the works which display His Glory and His love. Nowhere is there anything more full or more express on the subject of the Saviour of the world than is to be found in the whole range of the Bible. As St. Jerome says, "To be ignorant of the Scripture is not to know Christ."(10) In its pages His Image stands out, living and breathing; diffusing everywhere around consolation in trouble, encouragement to virtue and attraction to the love of God. And as to the Church, her institutions, her nature, her office, and her gifts, we find in Holy Scripture so many references and so many ready and convincing arguments, that as St. Jerome again most truly says: "A man who is well grounded in the testimonies of the Scripture is the bulwark of the Church."(11) And if we come to morality and discipline, an apostolic man finds in the sacred writings abundant and excellent assistance; most holy precepts, gentle and strong exhortation, splendid examples of every virtue, and finally the promise of eternal reward and the threat of eternal punishment, uttered in terms of solemn import, in God's name and in God's own words.

4. And it is this peculiar and singular power of Holy Scripture, arising from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which gives authority to the sacred orator, fills him with apostolic liberty of speech, and communicates force and power to his eloquence. For those who infuse into their efforts the spirit and strength of the

Word of God, speak "not in word only but in power also, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much fulness."(12) Hence those preachers are foolish and improvident who, in speaking of religion and proclaiming the things of God, use no words but those of human science and human prudence, trusting to their own reasonings rather than to those of God. Their discourses may be brilliant and fine, but they must be feeble and they must be cold, for they are without the fire of the utterance of God(13) and they must fall far short of that mighty power which the speech of God possesses: "for the Word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."(14) But, indeed, all those who have a right to speak are agreed that there is in the Holy Scripture an eloquence that is wonderfully varied and rich, and worthy of great themes. This St. Augustine thoroughly understood and has abundantly set forth.(15) This also is confirmed by the best preachers of all ages, who have gratefully acknowledged that they owed their repute chiefly to the assiduous use of the Bible, and to devout meditation on its pages.

5. The Holy Fathers well knew all this by practical experience, and they never cease to extol the sacred Scripture and its fruits. In innumerable passages of their writings we find them applying to it such phrases as "an inexhaustible treasury of heavenly doctrine,"(16) or "an overflowing fountain of salvation,"(17) or putting it before us as fertile pastures and beautiful gardens in which the flock of the Lord is marvellously refreshed and delighted.(18) Let us listen to the words of St. Jerome, in his Epistle to Nepotian: "Often read the divine Scriptures; yea, let holy reading be always in thy hand; study that which thou thyself must preach. . . Let the speech of the priest be ever seasoned with Scriptural reading."(19) St. Gregory the Great, than whom no one has more admirably described the pastoral office, writes in the same sense: "Those," he says, "who are zealous in the work of preaching must never cease the study of the written word of God."(20) St. Augustine, however, warns us that "vainly does the preacher utter the Word of God exteriorly unless he listens to it interiorly;"(21) and St. Gregory instructs sacred orators "first to find in Holy Scripture the knowledge of themselves, and then to carry it to others, lest in reproving others they forget themselves."(22) Admonitions such as these had, indeed, been uttered long before by the Apostolic voice which had learnt its lesson from Christ Himself, Who "began to do and teach." It was not to Timothy alone, but to the whole order of the clergy, that the command was addressed: "Take heed to thyself and to doctrine; be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."(23) For the saving and for the perfection of ourselves and of others there is at hand the very best of help in the Holy Scriptures, as the Book of Psalms, among others, so constantly insists; but those only will find it who bring to this divine reading not only docility and attention, but also piety

and an innocent life. For the Sacred Scripture is not like other books. Dictated by the Holy Ghost, it contains things of the deepest importance, which in many instances are most difficult and obscure. To understand and explain such things there is always required the "coming"(24) of the same Holy Spirit; that is to say, His light and His grace; and these, as the Royal Psalmist so frequently insists, are to be sought by humble prayer and guarded by holiness of life.

#### What the Bible Owes to the Catholic Church

6. It is in this that the watchful care of the Church shines forth conspicuously. By admirable laws and regulations, she has always shown herself solicitous that "the celestial treasure of the Sacred Books, so bountifully bestowed upon man by the Holy Spirit, should not lie neglected."(25) She has prescribed that a considerable portion of them shall be read and piously reflected upon by all her ministers in the daily office of the sacred psalmody. She has ordered that in Cathedral Churches, in monasteries, and in other convents in which study can conveniently be pursued, they shall be expounded and interpreted by capable men; and she has strictly commanded that her children shall be fed with the saving words of the Gospel at least on Sundays and solemn feasts.(26) Moreover, it is owing to the wisdom and exertions of the Church that there has always been continued from century to century that cultivation of Holy Scripture which has been so remarkable and has borne such ample fruit.

7. And here, in order to strengthen Our teaching and Our exhortations, it is well to recall how, from the beginning of Christianity, all who have been renowned for holiness of life and sacred learning have given their deep and constant attention to Holy Scripture. If we consider the immediate disciples of the Apostles, St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp - or the apologists, such as St. Justin and St. Irenaeus, we find that in their letters and their books, whether in defence of the Catholic Faith or in its commendation, they draw faith, strength, and unction from the Word of God. When there arose, in various Sees, Catechetical and Theological schools, of which the most celebrated were those of Alexandria and of Antioch, there was little taught in those schools but what was contained in the reading, the interpretation and the defence of the divine written word. From them came forth numbers of Fathers and writers whose laborious studies and admirable writings have justly merited for the three following centuries the appellation of the golden age of biblical exegesis. In the Eastern Church, the greatest name of all is Origen - a man remarkable alike for penetration of genius and for persevering labour; from whose numerous works and his great Hexapla almost all have drawn that came after him. Others who have widened the field of this science may also be

named, as especially eminent; thus, Alexandria could boast of St. Clement and St. Cyril; Palestine, of Eusebius and the other St. Cyril; Cappadocia, of St. Basil the Great and the two St. Gregories of Nazianzus and Nyssa; Antioch, of St. John Chrysostom, in whom the science of Scripture was rivalled by the splendour of his eloquence. In the Western Church there were many names as great: Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory the Great; most famous of all, St. Augustine and St. Jerome, of whom the former was so marvellously acute in penetrating the sense of God's Word and so fertile in the use that he made of it for the promotion of the Catholic truth, and the latter has received from the Church, by reason of his pre-eminent knowledge of Scripture and his labours in promoting its use, the name of the "great Doctor."(27) From this period down to the eleventh century, although Biblical studies did not flourish with the same vigour and the same fruitfulness as before, yet they did flourish, and principally by the instrumentality of the clergy. It was their care and solicitude that selected the best and most useful things that the ancients had left, arranged them in order, and published them with additions of their own - as did S. Isidore of Seville, Venerable Bede, and Alcuin, among the most prominent; it was they who illustrated the sacred pages with "glosses" or short commentaries, as we see in Walafrid Strabo and St. Anselm of Laon, or expended fresh labour in securing their integrity, as did St. Peter Damian and Blessed Lanfranc. In the twelfth century many took up with great success the allegorical exposition of Scripture. In this kind, St. Bernard is pre-eminent; and his writings, it may be said, are Scripture all through. With the age of the scholastics came fresh and welcome progress in the study of the Bible. That the scholastics were solicitous about the genuineness of the Latin version is evident from the *Correctoria Biblica*, or lists of emendations, which they have left. But they expended their labours and industry chiefly on interpretation and explanation. To them we owe the accurate and clear distinction, such as had not been given before, of the various senses of the sacred words; the assignment of the value of each "sense" in theology; the division of books into parts, and the summaries of the various parts; the investigation of the objects of the writers; the demonstration of the connection of sentence with sentence, and clause with clause; all of which is calculated to throw much light on the more obscure passages of the sacred volume. The valuable work of the scholastics in Holy Scripture is seen in their theological treatises and in their Scripture commentaries; and in this respect the greatest name among them all is St. Thomas of Aquin.

8. When our predecessor, Clement V., established chairs of Oriental literature in the Roman College and in the principal Universities of Europe, Catholics began to make more accurate investigation on the original text of the Bible, as well as on the Latin version. The revival amongst us of Greek learning, and, much

more, the happy invention of the art of printing, gave a strong impetus to Biblical studies. In a brief space of time, innumerable editions, especially of the Vulgate, poured from the press and were diffused throughout the Catholic world; so honoured and loved was Holy Scripture during that very period against which the enemies of the Church direct their calumnies. Nor must we forget how many learned men there were, chiefly among the religious orders, who did excellent work for the Bible between the Council of Vienne and that of Trent; men who, by the employment of modern means and appliances, and by the tribute of their own genius and learning, not only added to the rich stores of ancient times, but prepared the way for the succeeding century, the century which followed the Council of Trent, when it almost seemed that the great age of the Fathers had returned. For it is well known, and We recall it with pleasure, that Our predecessors from Pius IV. to Clement VIII. caused to be prepared the celebrated editions of the Vulgate and the Septuagint, which, having been published by the command and authority of Sixtus V. and of the same Clement, are now in common use. At this time, moreover, were carefully brought out various other ancient versions of the Bible, and the Polyglots of Antwerp and of Paris, most important for the investigation of the true meaning of the text; nor is there any one Book of either Testament which did not find more than one expositor, nor any grave question which did not profitably exercise the ability of many inquirers, among whom there are not a few - more especially of those who made most use of the Fathers - who have acquired great reputation. From that time downwards the labour and solicitude of Catholics has never been wanting; for, as time went on, eminent scholars have carried on Biblical study with success, and have defended Holy Scripture against rationalism with the same weapons of philology and kindred sciences with which it had been attacked. The calm and fair consideration of what has been said will clearly show that the Church has never failed in taking due measures to bring the Scriptures within reach of her children, and that she has ever held fast and exercised profitably that guardianship conferred upon her by Almighty God for the protection and glory of His Holy Word; so that she has never required, nor does she now require, any stimulation from without.

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## **A Few Excerpts from Popes and Councils Urging the Reading or Study of the Bible**

**Pope St. Gregory I (died 604 AD)**

“The Emperor of heaven, the Lord of men and of angels, has sent you His epistles for your life’s advantage—and yet you neglect to read them eagerly. Study them, I beg you, and meditate daily on the words of your Creator. Learn the heart of God in the words of God, that you may sigh more eagerly for things eternal, that your soul may be kindled with greater longings for heavenly joys.”  
[Letters, 5, 46. (EnchBibl 31)]

### **Pope Pius VI (April 1st 1778 AD)**

“...you judge exceedingly well, that the faithful should be excited to the reading of the Holy Scriptures : for these are the most abundant sources which ought to be left open to every one, to draw from them purity of morals and of doctrine, to eradicate the errors which are widely dis-seminated in these corrupt times : this you have seasonably effected, as you declare, by publishing the sacred writings in the language of your country, suitable to every one's capacity ...”  
(Letter to the Most Rev. Anthony Martini, Archbishop Of Florence, on his Italian translation of the Bible)

### **Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903 AD)**

“The solicitude of the apostolic office naturally urges and even compels us...to desire that this grand source of Catholic revelation (the Bible) should be made safely and abundantly accessible to the flock of Jesus Christ”  
[Providentissimus Deus ( Nov. 18, 1893)]

“The calm and fair consideration of what has been said will clearly show that the Church has never failed in taking due measures to bring the Scriptures within reach of her children, and that she has ever held fast and exercised profitably that guardianship conferred upon her by Almighty God for the protection and glory of His holy Word...” Pope Leo XIII, Providentissimus Deus, On the Study of Sacred Scripture, 1893

“An indulgence of 300 days for reading the Holy Gospels is granted to all the Faithful who read these Holy Scriptures for at least a quarter of an hour, with reverence due to the Divine Word and as spiritual reading.... A Plenary indulgence under the usual conditions is granted once a month for the daily reading.” Pope Leo XIII. December, 1898, Preces et Pia Opera, 045. (Enchiridion Indulgentiarum, 694)

### **Third Council of Baltimore (7 December AD 1884)—for USA**

“It can hardly be necessary for us to remind you, beloved brethren, that the most highly valued treasure of every family library, and the most frequently and lovingly made use of, should be the Holy Scriptures.... We hope that no family can be found amongst us without a correct version of the Holy Scriptures

#### **Pope St. Pius X (1903-1914 AD)**

“Nothing would please us more than to see our beloved children form the habit of reading the Gospels - not merely from time to time, but every day.”

#### **Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922 AD)**

“Our one desire for all the Church's children is that, being saturated with the Bible, they may arrive at the all surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

15 September AD 1920 , Spiritus Paraclitus

He repeated St. Jerome's statement:

“Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

He expressed his desire that, “... all the children of the Church, especially clerics, to reverence the Holy Scriptures, to read it piously and meditate on it constantly.”

And he reminded them that,

“... in these pages is to be sought that food, by which the spiritual life is nourished unto perfection ...”

And in the same work wrote when founding the Society of St. Jerome:

“The object of this Society is to put into the hands of as many people as possible the Gospels and Acts, so that every Christian family may have them and become accustomed to reading them. This we have much at heart, for we have seen how useful it is. We earnestly hope, then, that similar Societies will be founded....Commendation too, is due to Catholics in other countries who have published the entire New Testament, as well as selected portions of the Old in neat and simple form so as to popularize their use. Much again must accrue to the Church of God when numbers of people thus approach this table of heavenly instruction which the Lord provided through the ministry of His Prophets,, Apostles and Doctors for the entire world.”

## **Pope Pius XII 1943 AD**

“Our predecessors, when the opportunity occurred, recommended the study or preaching or in fine the pious reading and meditation of the sacred Scriptures.

“... This author of salvation, Christ, will men more fully know, more ardently love and more faithfully imitate in proportion as they are more assiduously urged to know and meditate the Sacred Letters, especially the New Testament ...”

[Divino Afflante Spiritu]

He also granted indulgences (a blessing of God’s grace) to those who read Scripture.

## **Vatican II : 1965 AD**

“21. The Church has always venerated the Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God’s Word and of Christ’s Body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the Word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, 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. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to sacred Scripture: ‘For the word of God is living and active’ (Heb. 4:12) and ‘it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified’ ” (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13).”  
[DOGMAIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION (DEI VERBUM) 1965 AD]

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

133 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.

## **Current Indulgences for the Spiritual Reading of Sacred Scriptures**

A Plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful who read the Sacred Scriptures as spiritual reading, from a text approved by competent authority and with the reverence due to the divine word, for at least a half an hour; if the time is less, the indulgence will be partial.

(Manual of Indulgences 30 USCCB 2006...the indulgences were issued by the Holy See. Plenary. One would gain the Plenary Indulgence under usual conditions)

## **Pope Benedict XVI Weds Audience Nov 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 ( Regarding St. Jerome 4<sup>th</sup> Cent)**

Truly "in love" with the Word of God, he asked himself: "How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?" (Ep. 30, 7). The Bible, an instrument "by which God speaks every day to the faithful" (Ep. 133, 13), thus becomes a stimulus and source of Christian life for all situations and for each person. To read Scripture is to converse with God: "If you pray", he writes to a young Roman noblewoman, "you speak with the Spouse; if you read, it is he who speaks to you" (Ep. 22, 25). The study of and meditation on Scripture renders man wise and serene (cf. In Eph., Prol.). Certainly, to penetrate the Word of God ever more profoundly, a constant and progressive application is needed. Hence, Jerome recommends to the priest Nepotian: "Read the divine Scriptures frequently; rather, may your hands never set the Holy Book down. Learn here what you must teach" (Ep. 52, 7). To the Roman matron Leta he gave this counsel for the Christian education of her daughter: "Ensure that each day she studies some Scripture passage.... After prayer, reading should follow, and after reading, prayer.... Instead of jewels and silk clothing, may she love the divine Books" (Ep. 107, 9, 12). Through meditation on and knowledge of the Scriptures, one "maintains the equilibrium of the soul" (Ad Eph., Prol.). Only a profound spirit of prayer and the Holy Spirit's help can introduce us to understanding the Bible: "In the interpretation of Sacred Scripture we always need the help of the Holy Spirit" (In Mich. 1, 1, 10, 15).

A passionate love for Scripture therefore pervaded Jerome's whole life, a love that he always sought to deepen in the faithful, too. He recommends to one of his spiritual daughters: "Love Sacred Scripture and wisdom will love you; love it tenderly, and it will protect you; honour it and you will receive its caresses. May it be for you as your necklaces and your earrings" (Ep. 130, 20). And again: "Love the science of Scripture, and you will not love the vices of the flesh" (Ep. 125, 11).

For Jerome, a fundamental criterion of the method for interpreting the Scriptures was harmony with the Church's Magisterium. We should never read Scripture alone because we meet too many closed doors and could easily slip into error. The Bible has been written by the People of God and for the People of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this communion with the People of God do we truly enter into the "we", into the nucleus of the truth that God himself wants to tell us. For him, an authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmonious accord with the faith of the Catholic Church. It is not a question of an exegesis imposed on this Book from without; the Book is really the voice of the pilgrim People of God and only in the faith of this People are we "correctly attuned" to understand Sacred Scripture. Therefore, Jerome admonishes: "Remain firmly attached to the traditional doctrine that you have been taught, so that you can preach according to right doctrine and refute those who contradict it" (Ep. 52, 7). In particular, given that Jesus Christ founded his Church on Peter, every Christian, he concludes, must be in communion "with St Peter's See. I know that on this rock the Church is built" (Ep. 15, 2). Consequently, without equivocation, he declared: "I am with whoever is united to the teaching of St Peter" (Ep. 16).

### **Pope Benedict XVI Audience Oct 28 2009**

...is also important to set aside a certain period each day for meditation on the Bible, so that the word of God may be a light that illumines our daily pilgrimage on earth.

### **Pope Benedict XVI Address to Synod of Bishops Oct 6 2008**

Furthermore, the Word of God is the foundation of everything, it is the true reality. And to be realistic, we must rely upon this reality. We must change our idea that matter, solid things, things we can touch, are the more solid, the more certain reality. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord speaks to us about the two possible foundations for building the house of one's life: sand and rock. The one who builds on sand builds only on visible and tangible things, on success, on career, on money. Apparently these are the true realities. But all this one day will pass away. We can see this now with the fall of large banks: this money disappears, it is nothing. And thus all things, which seem to be the true realities we can count on, are only realities of a secondary order. The one who builds his life on these realities, on matter, on success, on appearances, builds upon sand. Only the Word of God is the foundation of all reality, it is as stable as the heavens and more than the heavens, it is reality. Therefore, we must change our concept of realism. The

realist is the one who recognizes the Word of God, in this apparently weak reality, as the foundation of all things. Realist is the one who builds his life on this foundation, which is permanent....

.....exegesis, the true reading of Holy Scripture, is not only a literary phenomenon, not only reading a text. It is the movement of my existence. It is moving towards the Word of God in the human words. Only by conforming ourselves to the Mystery of God, to the Lord who is the Word, can we enter within the Word, can we truly find the Word of God in human words. Let us pray to the Lord that he may help us search the word, not only with our intellect but also with our entire existence.

### **Some Quotes from Pope Benedict XVI on Lectio Divina**

“Note what Saint Jerome said in this regard: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (PL 24,17; cf Dei Verbum, 25). A time-honoured way to study and savour the word of God is lectio divina which constitutes a real and veritable spiritual journey marked out in stages. After the lectio, which consists of reading and rereading a passage from Sacred Scripture and taking in the main elements, we proceed to meditatio. This is a moment of interior reflection in which the soul turns to God and tries to understand what his word is saying to us today. Then comes oratio in which we linger to talk with God directly. Finally we come to contemplatio. This helps us to keep our hearts attentive to the presence of Christ whose word is "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet 1:19). Reading, study and meditation of the Word should then flow into a life of consistent fidelity to Christ and his teachings.”

(Message to the Youth of World Youth Day 9 April 2006)

“Among the many fruits of this biblical springtime I would like to mention the spread of the ancient practice of Lectio divina or "spiritual reading" of Sacred Scripture. It consists in pouring over a biblical text for some time, reading it and rereading it, as it were, "ruminating" on it as the Fathers say and squeezing from it, so to speak, all its "juice", so that it may nourish meditation and contemplation and, like water, succeed in irrigating life itself.

One condition for Lectio divina is that the mind and heart be illumined by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, and that they be approached with an attitude of "reverential hearing".” Angelus Nov 6 2005