

Homily: 28th Sunday: Cycle B: 2015: Wis 7:7-11; Ps. 90; Heb 4: 12-13; Mk 10: 17-30

“The Importance of the Bible in Our Spiritual Lives as Catholics”

As Catholics we base our Faith on both the Bible and Sacred Tradition. St. Jerome the great biblical scholar of the early Church once said, “*Ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.*” What did he mean by that? This is what I want to explore in today’s homily.

1. In today’s second reading from Hebrews we hear, “*Brothers and Sisters: 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. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.*” **The Bible is the Word of God in human language. By reading, meditating, studying and praying with the Sacred Scriptures we encounter the living God in all His splendor. If we don’t know the Scriptures well we will not know God well, because in the Scriptures we encounter God’s truth and the unfolding of His plan of salvation for the human race - we truly encounter the thoughts of His mind and Heart.** This passage from Hebrews is trying to bring across to us the reality that the word of God lays open: man’s real intentions and purposes in life (v.12) so there is no escaping the manifestation of man’s conscience (v.13); God is the judge of hearts and we will be rewarded for good and punished for evil. However that is not all, if we read on in the *letter to the Hebrews* we find out that our great High Priest Jesus understands the human condition from His own experience of suffering and temptation, but without sinning. Thus we can turn to Him in our weakness and pain and He will help us. This is just one passage from Scripture that should give us great consolation and guidance. **Bible study is such a rich exercise to guide our lives. Our spiritual lives as Catholics need to be rooted in the love of the Bible. It is an inexhaustible spiritual treasure! Don’t be afraid of the Bible! It is the wellspring of life for the Christian, and not just for non-Catholics Christians!** As to where to start: *the 4 Gospels are a good place, and then go from there either to*

the rest of the NT, or to look for the roots of the NT teaching in the Torah: the first 5 books of the OT, and also the Prophets, and please look at the Wisdom books which are particularly fascinating for understanding every day living rooted in God's will. There are so many good Catholic Bible studies out now that we can benefit from, including many online (see: www.css.catholicexchange.com, www.thebibletimeline.com, www.salvationhistory.com, www.archen.org/cbs, www.greatadventureonline.com, www.augustineinstitute.org). I will put a list of them in my bulletin column in the coming weeks. We can also benefit from meditating on the Sunday readings, the weekday Mass readings, and by praying the Liturgy of the Hours. **All these are practical ways of rooting our lives in God's holy word.** Also if you come to daily Mass, which I encourage more of you to do, you will hear much of the Bible in the course of the Liturgical year.

- 2. Our lives need to be rooted in God's holy word in the Sacred Scriptures which is the narrow path of wisdom.** St. Paul expresses this powerfully in his 2nd letter to his disciple Timothy chap 3, verses 15-17, "*Likewise, from your infancy you have known the Sacred Scriptures, the source of wisdom which through faith in Jesus Christ leads to salvation. All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching - for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work.*" **The word of God contained in the Scriptures is useful for teaching and for every good work.** The Bible is the source of true wisdom – it shows us the narrow path to salvation. **All Sacred Scripture is inspired of God:** it has God as its principle author, with the writer as the human instrument the Holy Spirit uses to say what needs to be said, and with the Church guided by the Holy Spirit discerning which books are legitimately from God and which ones are not: e.g., the 4 Gospels vs. the rejected gospel of Thomas, James, Judas, etc. (*the Church's Magisterium set and closed the definitive canon of Sacred Scripture or the Bible as we have it in its current form in the year 405A.D. by decree of Pope St. Innocent I*) To reiterate the Sacred Scriptures in the Bible is the Word of God in human

language, connecting us with THE WORD of God who is Jesus Christ, truly the Word or eternal Son of God made flesh (see the Gospel of John chapter 1: 1-18).

3. *You may say, well what about the **concern**, Father, that people will misinterpret what they read in the Sacred Scriptures, and isn't that why the Church in the past somewhat discouraged the laity from making Bible reading a key component of their spiritual lives? Well, there is a **risk**, but if you take some good practical steps that problem can usually be avoided, and it is a risk worth taking because all of us need to study and grow in our love of the Bible as Catholics. The **first** thing we should always do before reading the Bible **is to pray to the Holy Spirit** for guidance, inspiration, and protection from error. It can be as simple as: *Holy Spirit of love, please enlighten my darkened mind, strengthen my weak will and pierce my hardened heart, so that I may learn and put into practice what you want me to learn and see in your Holy word.*” **Secondly** when we encounter something in the Sacred Scriptures that we are perplexed by, we should consult the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and look up the Scripture reference in the index to put it in the proper context of our Catholic Faith. If we still need more guidance, **please consult a good Catholic bible study**, e.g., the ones by Dr. Scott Hahn (e.g. his *Understanding the Scriptures* complete course on the Bible- see amazon.com), **or a good faithful Catholic priest for help**. Also an excellent resource to help give you a simple foundational understanding of proper Biblical interpretation is the series *Beginning Apologetics* by Fr. Frank Chacon and Jim Burnham from San Juan Seminars. See vol. 1 (*How to Explain and Defend the Catholic Faith*) which deals with some of these questions (which we use in our Junior High CCD class), and esp. vol. 7 which is called: “*How to Read the Bible.*” These are great resources (they can be purchased at: www.catholicapologetics.com; they are also cheap: each booklet in the series is less than \$5). **Thirdly: don't be afraid: God will guide you, and as long as you don't cut yourself off from the Church and from the Catechism and the basic intuitive sense of the Catholic Faith which each of us should have if we are serious about the practice of our Faith and the spiritual life, you WILL NOT be led astray in reading and meditating on the Sacred***

Scriptures, especially if we use a good translation: *the Jerusalem Bible, the Ignatius Bible (from Ignatius Press), the Revised Standard Version, or the old Catholic Study Bible* as they usually have good footnotes to explain obscure passages. *Yes the Catholic Church as Spiritual Teacher and Mother of the faithful is **alone** the authoritative interpreter of the Bible, as she is the one who put the Bible together in the early centuries, guided and protected by the **Holy Spirit** throughout the process of discernment, who always leads the Church into greater understanding of the depths and spiritual riches of God's holy word.* But we as individuals must also plumb those depths in our own spiritual life if we want to grow in God's likeness: to tap into the very mind of God, by studying the word of God. We will then grow in *the gift of wisdom*, aided by grace (the very life of God Himself in our souls), which leads ultimately to Heaven as we get to know the Scriptures, and the word of God then remains rooted in our hearts and is transferred into the fruit of our actions on a daily basis under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Then we will say along with St. Jerome, *I have come to know Christ more and more as I have come to love and know His Sacred Scriptures, the Bible of Life!* God bless you.