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Lectio... The Word Coming Alive

Have you ever thought of the significance of the 'triple sign of the Cross' when the Gospel is read... Too often we do it automatically and forget its symbolism. When explaining it to a group of young Catechumens I realised how little I reflected on its deep meaning. As often happens while 'teaching' we become more aware of something, a double blessing for the giver and receiver. During the readings we also hear the words 'The Word of the Lord and The Gospel of the Lord' as the Lectionary is elevated. Both these actions tell us of the Spiritual significance and function of the content. The book containing the readings for the year and cycle is called the 'lectionary' which means the 'lessons' that are contained within it. The readings are from the Old and New Testament in sequence, according to the time of year. So crucial are they that without them we would not be able to live out the essence of Christianity based on what the Holy Spirit has inspired the prophets, teachers, leaders to tell us of the teaching He wants us to receive about how we should live. Further the teaching then are from Jesus himself as recorded by the Apostles and Disciples, The Lectionary is elevated and sometimes carried by the Deacon to remind us to take note of it not as a book but of its contents.



In the book of Jeremiah (23:29) we have the words 'Is My Word not like fire.... And like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces'. Again, St. Paul says (Hebrews 4:12) 'For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart'. How many times in the Bible do we have 'It is the Lord who speaks'? Too often we let the words of the New Testament, Jesus' lesson to us, wash over us, rather than absorb them and ponder them in our heart, mind and spirit. The words of the Lord are life-changing and direct, to help us understand what being a follower of Jesus really means... At different times in our lives, different passages take on a new and richer meaning. At other times the various parts of Jesus' life impact us and encourage or console us. Yet at other moments we can be left with doubts and we are being

taught to persevere, or perhaps listen more carefully to what is being said. That 'triple Cross' that was mentioned at the start is a symbol of that very essential prayer that we make to remind us that the words we are about to hear are *sacred words*, not merely some stories or past truths to be forgotten about as soon as we leave the church. So we sign ourselves with a triple reminder that these words are in our minds, always on our lips and deeply held in our hearts. What better way to encounter Jesus? But if we do not know the words of Scripture we cannot do any of these things, unless we dwell on them and learn them, we cannot follow the teachings that are contained.

Many people often say that it is hard to start reading the Bible and indeed it seems like a daunting book, with many sections that are difficult to absorb, especially in the Old Testament. It can seem almost impossible to read... yet to truly understand the New Testament, the Gospels, it is vital to attempt to see how God trained and led His people, as the sheep of His flock, through many trials. Jesus Himself refers frequently to the Old Testament so it is important to trace back why this is so. He came not to reject the Old Testament but to fulfil it. His coming is prophesied in the Old, and His Life and Death revealed in the New. We have both the Old and New Testaments in the context of the Mass. Every Christian denomination uses both.

In 'Sacred Pathways', as a means of prayer and journey to God the writer, Gary Thomas, suggests various ways in which we can start to read the Bible.

"It is good practice for every Christian to have some type of programme for regular reading through the Bible, whether it is once a year, or every three. You don't have to start at Genesis and conclude with Revelation. I have tried a number of approaches. You can read one Old Testament book, Genesis for example, then one New Testament book- Matthew, then go back to read Exodus, following it up with Mark and so on. Since there are twice as many Old Testament books as New, I found a helpful schedule that begins with Genesis, Psalms and Matthew, then follow each book in order, Exodus, Proverbs, Mark and so on."

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While this is a wonderful way to start for those who still would find it difficult- the tried and tested method of **Lectio Divina** is a good way to deepen our understanding and Love of the Word, Jesus, the Word made Incarnate, made flesh for us. This can be done alone or in a group. Many prayer groups follow this method by reflecting on one passage at a time in the New Testament (or Old). Even simpler and more direct is to look at the next week's reading in the Missal or Missalette. These readings can even be obtained on the Internet and you can be guided to the right readings for the Sunday – even if you have no Bible.

Lectio, or lesson can be done in a variety of ways, but essentially following a rough pattern of reading a passage two or three times with a time of silence in between to ponder what strikes you about it, or that you do not understand. You can then think carefully about the passage and ask the Lord to help you comprehend and enlighten you. This process is often referred to a **Lectio** or Reading, **Meditation** or trying to reflect and understand, **Oratio**.... or Praying about it and **Contemplation** or letting the words sink into our hearts like gentle rain, so we can live out what we have heard. It is often challenging but always rewarding and richly blessed for participants. In those 3-4 minute silences the Holy Spirit is at work in us to help us. Done in a group, with no judgment or correction and not as 'study' but as the Lord revealing Himself to us it is fruitful. You can be a beginner, and nothing more is required of you,

than to let the Lord touch your heart. You do not have to be a scholar or teacher – it is perhaps useful to have a leader or guide at first – but soon all will find this period of sharing rewarding, and it can bring together a group of people in love and prayer. Sometimes either the first or second reading can be added as well as the Gospel. Finally, even a reading of a few lines of Scripture or a Psalm, daily can inspire us and help us change. At the very least it is vital to listen to the homily, reflecting the Word for the day. The following words from a Special Pastor emphasise this: *“It is important, that we become more critical of the many voices that compete for our attention and our allegiance in the world we live in. Perhaps one of our problems today is that we are not giving the Good Shepherd a chance to show us the rich pastures He wants to lead us into. Jesus is a ‘truly magnificent’ Shepherd but He does most of His shepherding through Word and Sacrament. But this is a period in our history, when, so many of our people are absent from Church and miss out on this key form of the*



Lord's shepherding. That is why Evangelisation is so necessary and important” + + +

This month we have several Feast Days dedicated to Our Lady, who pondered the words spoken to her in her heart. Yes, some were sorrowful ('a sword will pierce your heart'), as they will be for us – but she also had Joy. The Gospel gives us joy, we lift up.... Exalt the Cross because it is the means of our Salvation, our Redemption. If this does not mean much to you then maybe reading the Gospels is what you need... try it!

Halina Holman

Pope Francis

The Bible is so dangerous that some Christians risk persecution to have one. Its life-changing role in daily life is important too. The Bible is not meant to be placed on a shelf, but to be in your hands, to read often – every day, both on your own and together with others. Why not read the Bible together as well – two, three, or four of you? In nature, in the woods, on the beach, at night in the glow of a few candles ... you will have a great experience! Read with attention! Do not stay on the surface as if reading a comic book! Never just skim the Word of God! Ask what God says to you through the Bible. Has he touched me in the depths of my longing?

What should I do? Only in this way can the force of the Word of God unfold. Only in this way can it change our lives, making them great and beautiful.”

Vat. Oct 2015

Prayer Intentions for September

- T**hat the World Meeting of Families under the banner 'The Gospel of the Family – Joy to the World' in Ireland bears fruit in Faith, Hope and Love.
- T**hat the Eucharistic Congress in England brings us closer to Jesus living among us through Prayer, Worship and Adoration.
- F**inally, that the Papal Visit to Ireland is filled with Joy and Witness to an unbelieving world.

Feast Days in September

- 1st **World Day of Prayer for the care of Creation**
- 3rd St Gregory the Great, Pope
- 8th **Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 13th St. John Chrysostom
- 14th **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
- 15th **Our Lady of Sorrows**
- 17th St Robert Bellarmine, Bishop
- 20th St Andrew Kim Taegon & Korean Martyrs
- 21st **St Matthew, Apostle**
- 24th **Our lady of Ransom and Walsingham**
- 26th Ss Cosmos and Damien
- 27th St Vincent de Paul, Priest
- 29th Ss Michael, Gabriel & Raphael, Archangels

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