



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday is called "Word of God Sunday," an invitation, an opportunity to delve more deeply into the Word of God, specifically through the Bible. For those of you who are listening to Fr. Mike Schmitz's "The Catechism in a Year," you know that we have been making our way through the section on Divine Revelation – how God reveals Himself to us (if you have not been listening, I highly recommend it... we're not too far in to catch up!). Fr. Mike reminds us that we are NOT a religion of the book. What do I mean by that? We are a religion based on the Word of God, but the word of God is broader than the Bible. The Bible has preeminence of place, but God's word given to us through Apostolic Tradition (and, in fact, the Apostolic Tradition preceded the formation of the Biblical Canon, and even the writing of the New Testament), and through the Magisterium (the official teaching office of the Church).

Fr. Mike also points out that when reading the Bible, the Catechism reminds us that there are two senses of the Bible – the literal sense and the spiritual sense (listen to his podcast for "Day 16"). The literal sense shows us what actually happened and what was actually intended by the authors, and this is the basis for all other interpretations of the Bible. The spiritual sense is broken into three categories – the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical senses. Or, to put it another way, what the Scriptures say about *Jesus* (in sign, symbol and foreshadowing), what it says about *us*, what it says about *our destiny* (heaven). The spiritual sense was not necessarily known or intended by the authors, but because God is God and has an incredible overarching plan, He makes even actions and events stand for something deeper than the actions themselves. So, when we look at the Israelites crossing through the Red Sea, we know they actually went through the Red Sea, escaping from slavery (the literal sense), but it also stands for baptism and how we are saved from the slavery of sin (spiritual sense).

This is important for how we approach the Scriptures. If all we take away is the literal sense, then the Bible stays in the past – a nice piece of history, but with no relevance for us today. If all we do is focus on the spiritual sense of Scripture, we will end up misinterpreting it, and will find ourselves far afield from God's word for us. By looking at both the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, we can be open to an authentic, life-changing encounter with the word of God. And we NEED this encounter, for St. Jerome reminds us that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

So how do we read the Scriptures? There are many ways, but I will propose one, based on the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola (for more information, read Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV's book *Meditation and Contemplation*). Decide how and when you will read Bible – will you follow the Lectionary of the Mass, make your way through a particular book in the Bible, or do something else? Will you do this first thing in the morning, over lunch break, or at some other time? Once you have a plan for your reading, begin. Start by remembering God's love for you, and place yourself in His presence. Then pray for light from the Holy Spirit to guide you in your prayer. Read the passage. It is suggested that you read the passage a few times, slowly, paying close attention. If it is a story, maybe you can imitatively place yourself in the scene – what do you see, hear, feel, smell? If it is another form of Scripture (teachings, for example), spend some time with a particular word or phrase that strikes you. Let the Scriptures soak into your mind and heart. Talk to God about what you experience in your imaginative prayer or as you pray with that phrase. Then close with a simple prayer – an Our Father, or Hail Mary, for instance. It is good to have a journal and write down afterwards what you received in that prayer time.

The Bible brings us the living word of God! He so longs to speak His word of love to each of us. I encourage you to take the opportunity to enter into the great mystery of God's revelation to us – as He reveals His Heart to us – through the Sacred Scriptures.