My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, St. Paul speaks to St. Timothy (and to us) about the Sacred Scriptures:

**All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.** (II Timothy 3:16)

St. Paul reminds us of something very important: the Bible is not just human words, but *the very word of God*! The Bible is different from every other book in the world. While other books may speak to us God’s love and His message to us in a mediated way, the Scriptures speak His word to us in an immediate (un-mediated) way – it is God Himself speaking to us in the Bible. As one Catholic theologian put it:

**Scripture is not only divinely guaranteed, it is divinely true. The Spirit did not only dictate it; he is, as it were, contained in it. He inhabits it. His breath perpetually animates it. The Scripture is “made fruitful by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.” It is “full of the Spirit.”** (Henri de Lubac)

De Lubac says that God the Holy Spirit inhabits the Scriptures. When we prayerfully read (hear) the Bible, we have contact with the Holy Spirit.

I have found many times in my life that when I have been reading the Scriptures (or listening to the Scriptures being read), a word or phrase strikes me as it never had before; it speaks to my circumstances here and now in my life. This is the Holy Spirit speaking. God has a word of love for me in that moment.

**And He wants to speak to *all* of His children in this way.**

I encourage you to read the Bible – every Catholic should read the Bible. But if you’ve never spent time with the Bible, how begin?

First, make sure you have a Catholic Bible. There are many translations and interpretations of the Bible into English, but not all are good, and most Protestant Bibles are missing seven books and parts of others. Some good translations are the New American Bible (Revised Edition) (NABRE), the Jerusalem Bible or the New Jerusalem Bible, the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE), and the Douay-Rheims Bible. If you want consistency, the NABRE is the translation we use at Mass. In addition, the St. Joseph Edition (NABRE) and the Ignatius Study Bible (RSVCE) have many good footnotes to help understand context and meaning.

Now that you have a good Catholic Bible, where to start? Some think we should read the Bible from start to finish. Remember, though, that the Bible is, in one sense, not one book, but many books. It was written in different styles, by different authors (though with the same Divine Author – the Holy Spirit), over many centuries. To read from start to finish without an understanding of the background will make it difficult to follow what’s going on. I usually encourage people to begin with the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), for these tell the stories of Jesus, and will be most familiar to us. This year, at Mass we are reading the Gospel of Luke. As of December 1 (beginning of Advent), we will begin a new cycle, reading the Gospel of Matthew at Mass.

Okay, so you have your Bible, and you’re ready to start reading one of the Gospels. How should you to read it? Because the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Scriptures, it would be good to invite Him in to your prayer time to help you understand what He is saying to you. A simple prayer like “Come, Holy Spirit” repeated a few times helps us be open to what He is saying. Then, I encourage you to read slowly, without a finish point in mind. Why? By reading slowly, you allow the words of the Scripture to penetrate. If you set the goal of “reading a chapter a day,” you may find that you just try to “get through it,” instead of listening to what God has to say to you. It’s like when a friend is telling you a story, but you just want to get to the end. If you constantly say to him, “What’s your point?” you’re being rude and you’ll probably miss important details of the story. I encourage you to sit with the Scriptures, letting them seep in, maybe rereading the same line or two over and over again, being steeped in the word of God. By doing this – taking time with God’s word – He speaks to me and to my life circumstances.

One final suggestion – have a prayer journal. As you are praying with the Bible, write down the insights you get. If you go back to them throughout the day or week, you will be able to continue your conversation with God.

I pray that each of us will find the Lord speaking to us in the Scriptures! God’s words sometimes cut us (when we need to change), but they are always, always, always words of *love* and *life* for our lives.