

Seminarians of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg Newsletter

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Reflection from Oliver Omega



Oliver Omega
Theology 3
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

During the mid-Fall of my first year at the seminary, a fellow seminarian asked about how the seminary life was going so far. I replied that things were well! When I asked him the same question, he replied that “he was happy” adding “he was where God wanted him to be at this time.” I brought this conversation to my spiritual director. I didn’t feel the same way then, and it concerned me. He replied, “you come from different paths. Give it time.” So I prayed to God and asked him what he wanted of me; and why I was here at the seminary. Later on, while praying the Divine Office before the Blessed Sacrament, I read: *“For I know well the plans that I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for woe! plans to give you a future full of hope”* (Jer. 29:10-11). I immediately felt a deep sense of peace, consolation, and an interior feeling of an answered prayer. The following Spring, when my spiritual director asked me how I felt after the Christmas break and being back in the seminary, I replied: “I feel like I am where God wanted me to be at this time”.

Sacred Scriptures, indeed speak to us. It is the word of God that endures and transcends. Written roughly two thousand years ago, it communicates to us now! The center of the written word is Christ, who reveals to us the Father, and the Holy Spirit the Paraclete whom he sends. But it also reveals to us, ourselves; who we are, what we are, and where we are meant to be.

We have a body and a soul, created in the image and likeness of God. But where once was harmony, sin caused disharmony. Thus, tension exists between our bodily passions, against the intellect and will of the soul. We are as if “fragmented” as St. Paul wrote, *“I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do, I do not do; but what I hate, I do”* (Romans 7:15). Sin alienates us from ourselves, and because of this, our response to God is imperfect, half-hearted, and clouded by self-centeredness.

Sacred Scriptures reveal to us the life, the works, and the teachings of Our Lord Jesus. In it, we come to know Christ himself. For this reason, it is indispensable for the baptized Christian. Since Christ was sinless, his humanity was perfect and whole. His human will submits to his divine will; and because of this, he gives himself fully and not half-heartedly to the Father. Through our baptism, we are called to do the same; that our will submits to the Divine will. It is therefore through Christ that we truly come to discern and find ourselves. Through Sacred Scriptures, we can meditate and imitate Christ’s humanity in the hope that, with the deposit of faith in the Church and the Sacraments which Christ instituted, we may come to share in his divinity.

Reflection from Christopher Pugh



Christopher Pugh
Pastoral Internship
St. John Brebeuf Parish, Winnipeg

*We speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we
read the divine saying.*

- Dei Verbum 25

The book of Revelation is such a fascinating piece of apocalyptic literature. This book, the last book in the Bible, has been interpreted in many ways by many different people. Currently, along with a wonderful group of ladies over zoom, I am undergoing a study of this book to better understand its meaning not only in context, but in my life as well. Each lesson, as we dive into the historical, literary, religious and other contexts, we find ourselves amazed at the abundance of meanings we can draw from each passage. Not only was this book relevant for the people at the time of its writing, but it is relevant for all people at all times. Many people see us living through an apocalypse in our current time, but I can assure you, people throughout history have been thinking the same thing at their times as well.

Every time I open the Bible, regardless of my intention, I know that there is something that God wants me to receive from the experience. Whether this is through study, prayer, simple reading, or even just needing to hear God, I know he will give me something. I may not always realize right away what he is sharing with me, but it always comes. Along the journey of discernment, the Bible has been an indispensable part of the process. And no matter how much I study or pray over it, there is ALWAYS more to receive.

I would like to share two experiences that I have found to be formative in my prayer life with Scripture. First, when I began an Ignatian retreat and found out I would be meditating with the same passage over and over for a significant period of time, I thought to myself there is no way I could possibly sit with 5-10 verses of scripture for any more than

maybe an hour. How can you gain more from such a small section with any more time than that? And let me tell you I was very, very wrong. I spent hours and hours over days contemplating a small portion of text without any commentaries, just the verses in front of me, and I felt like I had just begun to open up the passage. I placed myself within the story, put my perspective behind different figures, and simply let the story take place around, or even about me. Never again will I question the significance of even the smallest verse in the word of God.

Second, I am not one to flip open the Bible to random verses to get an instant message from God, although I understand how this can be helpful. However, one day I was really struggling with a particular issue and after a long time of silent prayer, decided to open the Bible for some parting words. Lo and behold a passage directly relating to my issue, with such strong words of comfort appeared before my eyes that I could not help but shed a stream of tears in joy at the loving presence of God in my life at that moment. Never underestimate the value of Scripture!

If you knew someone sent you a love letter, you would want to read it, you would want to understand it, and you would want to respond to it in some way. The Bible is the greatest love letter ever to have existed and it is written to and for YOU. By praying with the Scriptures, we grow ever closer to Jesus our Saviour. Even the book of Revelation, although seemingly filled with fire and brimstone, is truly a message of hope and joy in the amazing world to come. So, pick up this love letter from our Creator, and read the words of true love he gives us.

Reflection from Vince Diestro



Vince Diestro
Philosophy 1
St. Joseph Seminary

This past fall, I had the opportunity to take a course on the Introduction to Sacred Scriptures and its Interpretation as a part of my program. By the first couple of weeks of taking this course, I immediately acknowledged the significance of praying with Scriptures. In hindsight of taking the course, I have learned to recognize how essential it is to incorporate praying with Scriptures in one's spiritual life. How much there is to discover in the Bible and how much God desires to grow in intimacy with us through His Word as Saint Philip Neri says that "the Wisdom of Scripture is learned rather by prayer than by study." Prior to entering the seminary, I remember that I seldomly prayed *with* the Bible. Sure, there have been some occasions where I was moved by the Gospel or a reading from a particular Mass and I simply prayed and meditated on it shortly after Mass. But to sit down and set time aside praying with Scriptures was one of the practices I did not incorporate into my spiritual life at the time.

Since entering the seminary, I was able to fall deeply in love with the Bible! One way I was able to grow my love for Sacred Scriptures was through *Lectio Divina* (Latin), which simply means "Divine reading". This may be a practice some are familiar with, but I can argue that not many people are aware of such an ancient and beautiful practice dating back to the 3rd Century. It is simply a time reserved to pray *with* a particular passage consisting of several verses in the Bible. An example can be the daily readings for mass or perhaps the Gospel for Sunday's Masses. The four basic steps and movements of this practice are: 1.) *Lectio* ("reading"—what does this passage say in itself) 2.) *Meditatio* ("meditation"—what is God saying to you?) 3.) *Oratio* ("prayer"—talk to God about the text) 4.) *Contemplatio* ("contemplation"—resting in God's presence). It is through incorporating these steps during times of prayer that I was able to grow closer to Christ through the Bible. Especially during times where I find myself praying with a particular passage that somehow becomes relevant to my current state of life.

Entering into prayer with Sacred Scriptures gives God the opportunity to speak to us. I know from personal experience that there have been numerous times where I would pray for a particular petition and at times almost seemed like I was "by myself" or felt that "no one" was listening. Only a few days later I receive an answer either from a reading at mass or when I am practicing

Lectio Divina with a particular passage. God can and will speak to us through His Word! We simply have to stay faithful and patient in the silence, especially in times where we feel like a particular passage is "dry", "empty", or "does not speak to us". We must remember that God never leaves a prayer unanswered, He can respond in ways we might not expect. It can be a "yes", "no", or "not yet" or "wait". It's good to be open to whatever answer He gives us and to have faith in knowing that He is doing what is best for us at that particular moment. Pope Benedict XVI says that, "the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that *intimate dialogue* in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime."

We should acknowledge that praying with Scriptures (and in general) will not always be this amazing and moving experience where God always responds to our prayers and we always leave prayer feeling certain and relieved of our requests. We are called and *invited* to enter into relationship with the Lord and to trust in Him in the silence we might experience in prayer. Sometimes God may choose to remain "silent", but this could perhaps be Him calling us to simply dwell in His presence, to spend some intimate time with Him, and "to be still and know that [He] is God!" (cf. Psalm 46:10). One of the Church's beloved saints, Saint John of the Cross says that "silence is God's first language" and this is something we should not simply brush over. Pope Benedict XVI reiterates this point by saying, "God speaks in silence, but we *must* know how to *listen*." Learning how to sit still in embracing the silence turned out to be one of the greatest lessons I learned in my first year in the seminary last year, especially praying with Scriptures. It is also important to remember that we can *never* exhaust passages in the Bible. The Lord can speak to us in different ways with the *same* passage no matter how many times we've prayed and meditated on it.

Since entering the seminary and discerning the call to the priesthood, I have learned to recognize the importance of cultivating the practice of praying with Scriptures into my spiritual life and what it means to grow closer to God through His Word!

Saint Jerome, pray for us!

Prepared by the seminarians of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Please direct any questions or comments to Communication Services, Archdiocese of Winnipeg

communications@archwinnipeg.ca

(204)452-2227 ext. 225