

January 27, 2019 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

A newlywed couple were lying in bed one morning and the husband says to the wife, "How about you go and brew us some coffee." The wife said, "That's your job." Husband says, "Says who?" She says, "The bible, it's just about on every page." He says, "The bible doesn't say anything about coffee." So she picked her bible up off the nightstand, started flipping through the pages and pointing, "Yes it does, see; Hebrews, Hebrews, Hebrews."

Today's readings remind us of the importance of sacred scripture, the Word of God in our lives, and those who help us understand them. Our Lord never meant us to try and understand scripture, His Word, alone, without help.

In our first reading today, the people were granted freedom from bondage in another country and they came back and they found everything destroyed in Jerusalem. So, they spent some time rebuilding the shops, the houses, and the temple. During construction of the temple, they found scripture. Something they hadn't seen or heard for over generations, 60 – 70 years. The priest found a scroll with the Law on it and for them it was the first five books of our old testament, the Pentateuch. Today we see that once the temple was finished, in our first reading, they had a liturgical service and the priest read all five books at once, to the people. It took hours, and they realized who they were. They found their identity once again, in the words of sacred scripture, just as we do especially in the gospel today. In reading the gospel, we don't disregard the old testament because the gospels are a fulfillment of the old testament. God's Word endures throughout history. The new testament is a fulfillment of the prophecies of the old testament. It's what Jesus was talking about today. The new testament helps us to understand the old testament. Just as in Ezra's time, we have to have help with sacred scripture because if we don't, we'd all go off somewhere else where we don't belong, start thinking things that we shouldn't think about what it says and then trying to justify our actions by sacred scripture. How many people do that? They pick and choose what they want to read.

Today's second reading, Saint Paul is talking to the Corinthians in Corinth, Greece. It was a seaport and there were tons of immigrants. All these different cultures, all these different nationalities, all these different languages were sitting there in one city. When Paul founded a parish there, all these different groups of people came together. But, it wasn't long before Satan got in there and division started and they started looking at who had different gifts in the church. They started saying, "I'm better than you because I have this and you don't." Division, and anger, and frustration started. So, Saint Paul writes a letter today that, through baptism we are one body in Christ. We are incorporated in the mystical body of Christ, the Church. There was one Spirit that came to us in baptism and that Spirit sustains us even to today. We hear the word of God and we want faith in our hearts, our souls because of it. We put our love, our faith, and our trust in the Word of God, Jesus. Completely (hopefully). Although we are one body, one spirit in Christ, we don't all have the same role. We have different roles in the Body of Christ so that the Kingdom of God can be built much more efficiently. Even the one I hate in today reading, the gift of administration. I hate that one because they are overemphasizing that today if you are a pastor. You've got to do away with other things. So thanks to the apostles and the teachers, we have been able to have the Word of God communicated down through history. And the Word always continues, always.

Today's gospel, Saint Luke is writing to Theophilus. Theophilus is not a person, Theophilus means, "Lover of God." Saint Luke is writing to all followers of Christ, then and in the future. He wanted the message to be written down and handed on. Our Lord too, shows us that He reads scripture. Can you imagine God, who is behind all the scripture and probably has it memorized, He sits down and reads scripture. So we should too. He tells us, "I have come to fulfill all the promises and prophecies of the old testament." What we call the bible today has passed through oral and written traditions, compiled into books at various stages, and the books were finally compiled into the bible. The word bible means, book. Surprise. So we have a book of books. Without God's Word in that book, the Holy Spirit guiding it, it wouldn't fit together like a jigsaw puzzle with one picture, and that picture is Jesus Christ. We lose our identity and our way in the world like the Jews did in the time of Ezra, the scribe. They were in another country, nobody was able to teach them, nobody was able to read scripture to them, so they lost their identity. It wasn't until the first reading that they picked it up again. So, we have the Word of God and God wants us to know what He's done, and God wants us to know who He is. That comes through in sacred scripture. As Catholics we have 46 old testament books and 27 new testament books. In the 1500's when Martin Luther decided to quite being a priest and start his own religion, he started deleting things out of the bible that he didn't like. They have seven less books in the Protestant King James version. The Council of Trent, because of Martin Luther in the 1500's finally sat down and said, "These are the books in the bible." They didn't need to codify it, they didn't need to make up rules until somebody started going against it. That's usually what happens. People start saying, "There ought to be a law." Or, "We need to define this." And it happens. Like when people were saying several years ago, "We need the speed limit on Hunt Highway to be 45 not 35. They listened, now it's 45 except for some people who forgot. None of you, I hope, anyway.

The Catechism teaches us the manner in which scripture was handed down. Just like the visions were. Our Lord was the fulfilment of the Law of the prophets of ancient history. We learn about it through the old testament and His disciples put into writing what they learned about Him in the new testament. Now there were four gospels but only three evangelists. Matthew, Luke and John were apostles. Mark was the secretary of Saint Peter, so he got it from the boss and it's handed down to us in the form we have today. What's interesting is archeology has shown time and time again that what's in the bible is fact. They have discovered the places, they have discovered the names and they continue to discover even more. We found the dead sea scrolls that back up almost all the books in the new testament. There's proof for our bible, there's proof for Jesus, there's proof for everything in there. Yet, you can still go on the internet and find sites that say, "People that may not have existed, King Arthur & the knights of the round table, Jesus." So, some people still are going to try and say that Jesus didn't exist, yet we have proof. Our history, our culture as Christians is plugged into 3,000 years. We have history, we have tradition. We don't think about history a lot because our society is trying to do away with history, they're rewriting it. But we Christians have it, it's in the bible.

We take our vocation, our work, our talents, we make a contribution to the story. Each one of us contributes to the story. That contribution depends on how much we have been enbued with God's grace. The more God's grace saturates our hearts and minds, the more we will overflow with His blessings. We become active, courageous soldiers of Christ's light in this dark, evil infested culture. Today's readings remind us of something. That one of the most effective ways to get God's grace and to know who Jesus is, is daily bible reading. All of our readings today show reading from the bible. We read

from the bible. People tell us Catholics, they say, "You don't read the bible." We read it at every Mass, we're reading the bible but they don't understand because the bible is not sitting right here, we take it apart. There are people who say Catholics never read scripture. In the 1900's several popes wrote encyclicals saying, "Catholics, pick up the bible and read it, we don't have a problem with that, read it." Why didn't Catholics read the bible? It was in Latin and we weren't speaking Latin so nobody picked it up. Today people still don't pick it up, they buy it, or they're given one when they get married. When they invite Father over for dinner, "Oh, we better put the bible on the coffee table." Father knows you're not reading it. Once I looked at it and I ran my finger across when they weren't looking and there was dust. We are supposed to take the bible every day, we're supposed to take that book and we're supposed to read it, a little bit every day. That way we find out who Jesus is, get grace, and we're able to plug into the Church even better. And in our digital age there is no excuse not to. On any device you have, you can put the bible and it can be read to you. You can be walking down the street with earphones on, people will think, "Oh, he's listening to music." You can listen to the bible. Sitting in your car, anywhere you can listen to the bible. If you don't understand something, you can ask a question, "What does this mean in this passage?" Google and all of a sudden all these pages come up. Then you're going to say, "I don't know which one I should look at." So email Father and he'll tell you, it's easier that way. There is all kinds of resources to help us with the bible. We have scripture studies in the parish sometimes too, led by the deacon and his lovely wife. So, it's easy to get a hold of scripture, there's no excuse not to. People say, "I just want to listen to music on my way to work." Why don't you listen to God? Why don't you find out about God? Why? Because the bible is God's love letter to us. It's all about Gods' love for us. We all like to get love letters. We all like to put them away and then read them again. Reminds us that somebody cares, somebody loves us. Well the bible is Gods' love letter to us. There is a flowing fountain of wisdom, comfort, guidance, and strength. Saint Jerome in the 4th century was a great scripture scholar. He translated Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek into Latin so we could have the bible we have today. He said, "Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." Ignorance of Jesus. So if we truly want to know who Jesus is and how much God loves us, pick up the bible, pick up the love letter from God, and read it.

God bless you.