



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

Sacred Scripture: Part Two

Issue 52

Scripture: Part 12

November 23, 2008

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Catholics were not always encouraged to study the Bible. But with the Council's guidance, more Catholics are now reading the Bible than ever before. They are using historical research, literary analysis and the findings of archaeology to better understand the Bible, and many lay people are attending theology schools, joining Scripture study groups and reading articles and books on the subject. No longer are priests and religious the only scriptural experts. Today we'll look at some common questions about the Bible that may just prompt you to do some exploration of the Scriptures on your own.

Where does the Bible come from?

We think of the Bible as one book—and a big, formidable book at that! Someone might approach it like a novel. But setting out to read the Bible is more like trying to get through all the books in your local library. In fact, the word "bible" literally means "little library." Our Bible has many different kinds of writings between its covers, including prayers, genealogies, histories, poetry, letters, short stories, love songs and so on.

The Bible contains the records of 4,000 years of Judeo-Christian culture. Even before writing materials were invented, the many stories included in our Bible were

handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. We call this "oral tradition."

As time passed, the ancient Israelites began to commit their community's stories to writing. The earliest written stories told about the deeds of the kings. The people also began to write down their songs (psalms) as far back as the 10th century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). But most stories were written down between the fifth and the third century B.C.E.

How do we know what's true in the Bible?

One way to safeguard against misunderstanding the intent of an author is to determine the kind of writing the author has chosen to use. Any piece of writing has a particular literary form: poetry, prose, fiction, essay, letter, historical account and so on. This is as true of the biblical books as of any piece of contemporary writing.

If we misunderstand an author's literary form, we will misunderstand what the author intends to say. In order to understand what we are reading, then, we have to make allowances for the form and change our expectations accordingly.

Now look at how literary form functions in the Bible. One of the inspired biblical

authors—the author of the Book of Job—has written in the form of a debate. This literary form demands that you be as persuasive as possible on both sides of an issue. If you write on the side you agree with persuasively and the side you disagree with poorly, you have not written a good debate.

If you did not know that the Book of Job is a debate, in which some of the characters argue persuasively for the point of view with which the author disagrees, you might read an isolated passage and conclude that the book teaches the opposite of what the author intended to teach. You might think that the friends are teaching a valid message about suffering.

If we look at the book as a whole, we discover that the author places the truth he is teaching not on the lips of Job's friends but on the lips of God.

Why are some parts of the Bible so confusing?

All meaningful human expression must be interpreted to be understood. This is true of a film or novel, of a cartoon or a racing form, of a letter from a friend or a facial expression.

There is no such thing as reading a text "at face value," that is, without interpretation. To refuse to interpret is one way of interpreting, namely,

literalism. It does not deliver the "real unvarnished meaning" but condemns the reader to a superficial (at best) or erroneous reading.

Given that interpretation is necessary for genuine encounter with the word of God through Sacred Scripture, how is such interpretation to be done? Three connections are foundational.

First, we must be convinced that God does indeed desire to communicate with us and that the Bible is a privileged form of that communication.

Second, however, we must realize that the Bible is not a crystal ball. It is a text, and like all great texts it grows in meaning as our life experience expands. But texts are themselves also products of the times, places, cultures and circumstances in which they were written.

Third, we readers are limited human beings. If we require preparation and effort to read the stock market report, we must expect interpretation of the biblical text to require effort: study, prayer, discussion.

*By Julie Zimmerman, found at St Anthony's Messenger:
www.americancatholic.org/News/FriarJack/fj011404.asp*

Blessing of Bibles at Masses the weekend of November 29 & 30. Make sure to bring your Bible with you!



Saint of the Day: St. Columban (543?-615)

On Sunday, November 23, the Church will remember St Columban.

Columban was the greatest of the Irish missionaries who worked on the European continent. As a young man he was greatly tormented by temptations of the flesh, and sought the advice of a religious woman who had lived a hermit's life for years. He saw in her answer a call to leave the world. He went first to a monk on an island in Lough Erne, then to the great monastic seat of learning at Bangor.

After many years of seclusion and prayer, he traveled to Gaul with 12 companion missionaries. They won wide respect for the rigor of their discipline, their preaching, and their commitment to charity and religious life in a time characterized by clerical slackness and civil strife. Columban estab-

lished several monasteries in Europe which became centers of religion and culture.

Like all saints, he met opposition. Ultimately he had to appeal to the pope against complaints of Frankish bishops, for vindication of his orthodoxy and approval of Irish customs. He reproved the king for his licentious life, insisting that he marry. Since this threatened the power of the queen mother, Columban was ordered deported back to Ireland. His ship ran aground in a storm, and he continued his work in Europe, ultimately arriving in Italy, where he found favor with the king of the Lombards. In his last years he established the famous monastery of Bobbio, where he died. His writings include a treatise on penance and against Arianism, sermons, poetry and his monastic rule.

Quote:

Writing to the pope about a doctrinal controversy in Lombardy, Columban said: "We Irish, living in the farthest parts of the earth, are followers of St. Peter and St. Paul and of the disciples who wrote down the sacred canon under the Holy Spirit. We accept nothing outside this evangelical and apostolic teaching.... I confess I am grieved by the bad repute of the chair of St. Peter in this country.... Though Rome is great and known afar, she is great and honored with us only because of this chair.... Look after the peace of the Church, stand between your sheep and the wolves."

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay

What if Every Catholic in the Diocese of Rochester Read the Same Book? Project Mark

Imagine the power of having all of us read the same book: the Gospel of Mark!

Spirit Alive! invites us all to know and understand Scripture better. What better way to do that than to devote some time to reading one book of the Bible: The Gospel of Mark?

Why Mark? During this liturgical year, the whole Church will hear the Gospel of Mark. During Ordinary Time our Sunday Gospels will be from the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Mark was written for early Christians who were experiencing persecution and suffering for their faith. It portrays Jesus as a man of action, a man always on the move to Spread the Word.

Things to consider as you read the Gospel of Mark.

How is Jesus' humanity revealed in this Gospel? How is His Divinity revealed?

How does Mark describe Jesus?

How would you describe what you have learned about Jesus?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus according to Mark?

What is the role of suffering in this Gospel?

Readings for Project Mark

Date	Read
Nov. 30:	Chapter One Reflect on Mk 1:1-8
Dec. 7:	Chapter Two Reflect on Mk. 2:1-12
Dec. 14:	Chapter Three Reflect on Mk. 3:13-19 & Mk. 3:31-34
Dec. 21 & 28	The Christmas Story
Jan. 4:	Chapter Four Reflect on Mk. 4:35-41

Go to www.Rochesterspiritallive.org for weekly reflection questions.

To be continued...

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.