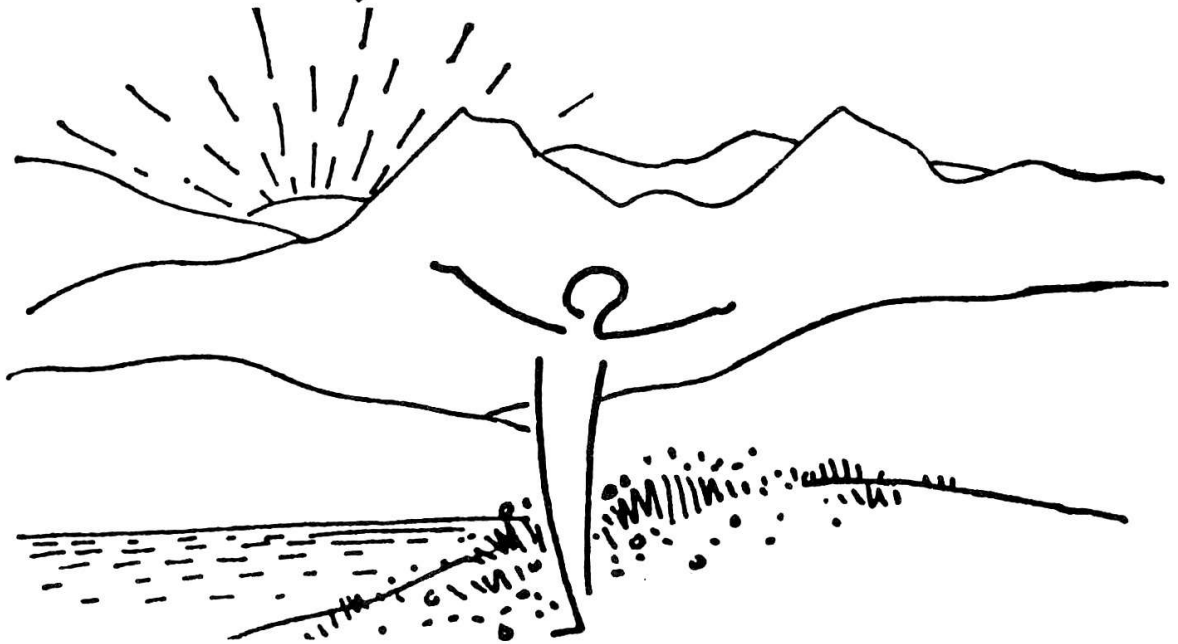


Sacred Scripture Pure and Perennial



Source of Spiritual Life

by Edward Malatesta S.J.

Every authentic form of spirituality will be Biblical, at least in its basic inspiration, for the Bible is not merely a unique record of God's interventions in History. It is an unparalleled gift by which he addresses and guides us today.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOD AND HUMAN PERSONS

The most basic religious problem is that of the possibility and the ways of communication between God and humanity. Those who claim to be atheists can only do so reasonably if they have never really encountered God in any recognizable way. Those who profess belief in God, live that faith and its consequences of love for Him and for others more or less intensely depending upon the degree of their experience of God. Every religious person knows that the mystery of our relationship with

the Lord has, considered from God's side, two complementary facets, his remoteness and his nearness, which evoke on our side the complementary experiences of distance from God and of closeness to him.

An authentic human relationship with God will necessarily be marked by the dialectic between remoteness and nearness, distance and closeness. It cannot be otherwise, because the limited and frail existence of every human being is infinitely different from the unlimited perfection of the one and only eternal God; while at the same time, to be created by God means to be related to him in all the fibres of one's being. For this basic relationship of creation to develop into one of conscious and intimate communion with God, recognizable communication between God and human persons is a prerequisite.

The God who created us did so precisely so that he could communicate with us and we with him. He wished to share his life with us, and to empower us to offer our lives to him in a loving exchange during our short existence in this world and throughout all eternity.

God speaks with each of us and invites our personal response at every stage of our pilgrimage on earth. He encounters each of us in a mysterious, hidden, veiled way in the depths of our heart, at the center of our personality, in the sanctuary of our conscience. Often God may be an unrecognized guest, an unknown voice, and so the human response to his silent words reach out to him as to one who is not clearly perceived. The lifelong dialogue of some persons with God may be carried out, from their side, in total darkness until they finally meet, in the perfect light of eternal day, the One who was always their unseen Lover and their unsuspected Beloved. Such may be the case for millions of human beings who do not know God explicitly. Other millions may know him in some way, but not as the Father of Jesus Christ.

We who profess the Christian faith believe that God has spoken in a particular way at least to a small part of the human race: to the people of Israel and to the people of the Christian Church. We cannot discuss here the new awareness that has emerged in the consciousness of the people of the Old and New Covenants. We can, however, at least allude to the fact that we have come to recognize ourselves as minorities in the contemporary world, as not the only ones who have profound religious traditions, and yet as bearers of unique and privileged gifts of communication with God.

Precisely at a time when we sense our minority status, we who are distinguished by a faith based upon the Bible have reached new insights into the richness and permanent value of the written Word of God. Progress

in the biblical sciences moves apace with current reflection on the relationship of biblical faith to other forms of religious belief, or to lack of belief, experiences lived by the greater part of the human race. Indeed awareness of our religious difference from others has become a stimulus not only to understand them better, but also to deepen our knowledge of ourselves.

THE GIFT OF THE WRITTEN WORD

The Bible is first of all a gift. It is a gift which comes to us from God himself through the individuals and communities who perceived and welcomed his revelation to them, who reflected upon his Word, proclaimed it to their contemporaries, expressed it in writing, and handed down its written form to succeeding generations. The written Word of God in its definitive canon, the books of the Old and the New Testaments, has been preserved, venerated, announced, contemplated, and scrutinized from age to age. Each time that we pray over or study a page of the Sacred Scriptures, each time that we read from or comment on the Word of God in the liturgical assembly, we enter into the mystery of a privileged communication between God and His people. We become debtors to the Lord for "in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them" (Vatican II Dei Verbum, 21). We become debtors likewise to all those who have made it possible for us to benefit from this treasure and who have enriched it by their study, prayer, preaching and example. No less than the Body of Christ, the Sacred Scriptures form part of that unique table of Sacrament and Word from which the Christian faithful are nourished.

RECEIVING THE SCRIPTURES

The unparalleled gift of the written Word of God invites from those to whom it is offered attitudes of humble gratitude, trusting faith, docile listening, and generous response. To be in contact with the Scriptures is to be in contact with our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the Father who speaks to us through the human authors and through the ministry of those who are witnesses to this Word by preaching, teaching and example. He speaks to us in order to reveal His love for us, His will in our regard, the destiny He has prepared for us. But He speaks to us especially of His Son, Jesus Christ. The entire Bible, though composed of many books is really only one book. As Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) said so well, "All of Sacred Scripture is one book, and that one book is Christ, because all of Sacred Scripture speaks of Christ, and all of Sacred Scripture is fulfilled in Christ."

The Old Testament itself witnesses to Jesus and is understood only by reference to the New Testament, while the New Testament is hidden in and prepared by the Old Testament. The books of the New Testament, though fewer in number and size, contain in a highly concentrated way the full splendor of the revelation offered us in the person of Jesus. The record of his life and Paschal Mystery were reflected upon and proclaimed in the first Christian communities (the Gospels). In narrating the growth and problems of these communities and the activities of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, the New Testament reveals the Christian response to Jesus (Acts and the Letters). Finally we are given a reflection upon the life of the Church in light of the triumph of Christ and the eternal glory of his elect (Revelation).

The Holy Spirit who was active in those who first received, developed and committed to writing the record of privileged moments in the dialogue between God and His people, is the Spirit who enables succeeding generations of God's people to receive, understand and live this Word. "The Sacred Scriptures are to be read in the same Spirit by whom they were written." It is not surprising that the new discovery of the riches of the Word of God is being followed by a new realization of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

The Scriptures have been so much a part of our lives, at least from the point of view of our material exposure to them, that we may too easily take them for granted. Just as we should pause for a moment to bless God and to thank him for the food we daily receive, so we should approach our encounter with the Scriptures in moments of liturgy, private prayer, study and on other occasions with hearts filled with quiet gratitude for a gift which has the Father's gracious initiative for its origin, the Son's obedient sacrifice as its content, the Spirit's constant assistance for its inspiration, and the communities of God's people as its mediators.

The written Word of God cannot be put on an equal footing with any other literature, religious or secular. With humility and with loyalty we recognize that our heritage, underserved by us, contains a unique record of interventions of God in human history all centered around the person of Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery. Our Sacred Scriptures, to be adequately received, must be received in faith - faith that through the sacred writers God has spoken to His people in the past and that through them He speaks to us today; faith that God has guided his people in the composition and preservation of these books; faith that he guides us today, as he guided past generations, in the interpretation of them; faith that God's Word to us "is living and active, sharper than any two-

edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4,12).

When with faith we recognize that in the Sacred Scriptures God does indeed speak to us, the consequent attitude on our part should be a respectful and humble listening. The exhortation to hear is frequent throughout the Bible (e.g. Dt 6,4; Jer 7,2; Mk 4,3.9; Rev 2,7 etc.). Listening to the Word of God involves an openness and readiness which spontaneously expresses itself in a petition: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears" (1 Sm 3,9). The faithful disciple will want to sit at the Lord's feet and cling to his every word (Lk 10,39). Along the road of our pilgrimage through life, Jesus himself is our companion, and when we listen to the explanation he himself gives us of the Scriptures, our hearts burn within us (Lk 24, 27.32).

The gift of God's Word is given to us everyday so that our lives may bear fruit in this world. Because God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways not his ways (Is 55,8), we need his Word to instruct us, to transform us, to enable us to cooperate with Him in the work of our salvation: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Is 55,11)."

In the Gospels, Jesus himself assures us that one who hears his words and does them builds the house of his life upon a rock that will resist all storms (Mt 7,24). The teaching of Jesus and the words of all the Scriptures to which his words are the key purify those who receive them (Jn 15,3). They are a mediation of the presence of Jesus himself within us enabling us in our turn to dwell in him. His words prepare us to make petitions which will be answered (Jn 15,7), and bring us the fullest share possible in his own joy (Jn 15,11).

Our response to the Word of God should be modelled upon Jesus' own *yes* (2 Cor 1,19), for "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4,4; Dt 8,3).

PROCLAIMING THE SCRIPTURES

The ministry of the Word has characterized the people of God from its earliest beginnings. The leaders and prophets of his people have

always had the responsibility of being personal witnesses to the Word and of mediating this Word to others. As this Word was gradually put in writing to form our sacred books, there was the added duty to proclaim the written Word especially in public assemblies dedicated to the worship of God, and to comment upon and explain the written Word and its implications for the lives of those who heard or read it.

The Christian liturgy is the moment par excellence to present God's Word to his people. When the followers of Jesus are assembled in his name, He joins their prayer to his own prayer, their offering of themselves to his offering of himself to the glory of the Father. The Holy Spirit energizes the Word read and commented upon so that it does not remain a dead letter but becomes a Word of life. Every sensitive and attentive minister of the Word has had the experience of seeing the liturgical assembly moved by the power of God's Word and its meaning for their lives. Nowhere do we better experience that the Word is meant for our instruction and consolation, for our perseverance and harmony (see Rom 15,4). Moreover, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tm 3,16). When the Eucharist is celebrated, the liturgy of the Word prepares for a new encounter with the Lord's Body and Blood. The Jesus portrayed in the sacred books is the same Jesus, now perfected and glorious, with whom the faithful commune sacramentally. The gift of themselves to Jesus and of Jesus to them conforms still more perfectly the members of Christ with their Head, and strengthens their unity with him who has been contemplated and responded to in the liturgy of the Word.

The Word is proclaimed also in the celebration of the other sacraments and in the Divine Office. The recently revised rite of Penance offers further opportunities for experiencing the Word's creative inspiration and efficacious power. The leaders of the Christian community wish all the faithful at the key moments of life, and, as far as is possible, at certain hours of each day, to be exposed to the treasures of the Scriptures. The ministers to whom the spiritual nourishment of God's people has been entrusted could have no better motive for acquiring and developing their own taste for the Scriptures than that of using well the frequent opportunities they now have to prepare their people to receive the Lord's grace through this privileged means.

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

The importance correctly accorded the written Word of God in contemporary spirituality invites each of Christ's followers to a serious study of the sacred text. It would not be too much to say that such study

is an obligation, all the more so in the case of those who are responsible for a ministry of the Word in the Christian community. The striking witness of one clergyman can be a stimulus and encouragement: "I begin on Monday to prepare next Sunday's sermon by studying the original text of and several commentaries on the biblical passages to be preached." Fortunately the results of the progress made in biblical studies are accessible today at different levels, from annotated editions of the Bible and homily hints to scientific commentaries and scholarly articles. Intensive programs of retooling devised for clergy, occasional workshops and study days, as well as countless summer sessions provide a variety of opportunities for improving one's knowledge of God's Word. There is something somewhere for everyone, and what is most suitable for each is a grace generously offered and generously to be accepted.

Ideally each minister of the Word should reserve some time for regular study of the Scriptures. Many priests, deacons and catechists find that the preparation of the liturgy of each Sunday and even of each weekday can be an occasion for at least some moments of serious effort to familiarize themselves with the historical context, language, style and meaning of the biblical authors. Those who are consistent in their efforts grow in a knowledge of the Bible. Such growth is a joy to themselves and to their people.

CONTEMPLATING THE SCRIPTURES

But for the Bible to yield its treasures and become a living, efficacious Word more is required than study alone. The dialogue between God and His faithful ones which can be occasioned and furthered by the Scriptures requires also those moments of private contemplative prayer where heart can speak to heart. The Old Testament writers are to be listened to as so many ancestors who illustrate the meaning of Jesus and his Church in the fulness of God's plan of salvation for the nations. All the authors of the New Testament represent the reflection of the first communities on the consequences of the teaching of Jesus. The words and actions of Jesus himself as mediated to us by the evangelists are meant to be pondered peacefully so that they may reveal the heart of Christ to us in ever new ways, draw us to grow in our love for Him, and strengthen us in our efforts to have in us that mind which was and is in Christ Jesus. Just as a gentle breeze caresses every leaf of the trees which stand in its path, so the words of Sacred Scripture enlighten, heal, and console every corner of our being, every aspect of our lives.

The perfect model of those who contemplate the Scriptures has always been and always will be Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother.

She was receptive to the Lord's revelation: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1,38). Her awareness of the needs of others led her to intercede with her Son for them and to recommend obedience to Jesus: "They have no wine... Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2,3.5). She treasured all the mysterious events of Jesus' life and pondered them in her heart (Lk 2,19.51). More than for her physical motherhood, Mary was blessed because she listened and obeyed: "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk 11,28). Her fidelity to the Incarnate Word during his Passion prepared her to become the Mother and model of all Jesus' disciples: "Woman, behold, your son!... Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19,26-27). As the first disciples awaited in prayer the coming of the Holy Spirit, Mary was in their midst (Acts 1,14).

It was by the action of the Holy Spirit that Mary first conceived Jesus in her heart and then in her womb. The same Spirit of the Lord enables his disciples to receive, cherish and love his Word. The Spirit's role is to guide them to an understanding of all the Truth revealed in Jesus (Jn 16,13). The Spirit awakens and nourishes in us the memory of Jesus, his words, and his deeds (Jn 14,25). The Spirit bears witness to Jesus and makes us witnesses in our turn (Jn 15,26-27).

THE WORD OF GOD IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The history of Christianity demonstrates the esteem in which the Scriptures were held and the earnestness with which saints and scholars ruminated on them. The great Saint Anthony, founder of monasticism, upon hearing Mt. 19,21 read in church, decided to leave all and follow Christ in poverty, prayer and service to his neighbor: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." St. Athanasius tells us that the religious communities which eventually grew up around Anthony applied themselves to reading the Scriptures.

The Rule of St. Benedict, the Magna Carta of western monastic life, joins together meditation and reading (ch. 48), and calls every page of both Testaments the "surest norm for human living" (ch. 73). St. Bernard and the Cistercian tradition excelled in the art of contemplating the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Bernard encourages his monks to experience what they read or hear in the Scriptures: "Apply you your inner hearing, use the eyes of your heart, and you will learn by your own experience the meaning of what is said." For him "Contemplation results from the condescension of the Word of God to human nature through grace and the exaltation of human nature to this very Word through divine love."

But the Bible was not considered to be reserved to monks and contemplatives. The Fathers encouraged the educated laity to read the Scriptures. For example, St. Gregory the Great wrote to a doctor: "Apply yourself, I beg you, to meditate every day on the words of your Creator. Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God."

The medieval cathedrals are a translation of the Scriptures into the artistic language of sculptured stone and stained glass to which all the faithful were exposed.

Through the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, all categories of persons have been taught to contemplate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels and to allow their lives to be changed because of such contemplation. One of the early companions of Ignatius, Jerome Nadal, said that the *Spiritual Exercises* have such surprising efficacy because they teach the art of disposing oneself to receive the Word of God and especially the Gospel. In our own day this efficacy is being rediscovered, particularly by persons who make individually directed retreats.



The Evangelists Luke and Matthew according to a 15th century fresco on Cyprus.

Venerable Mary of the Incarnation (d. 1672) is an example of the inspiration from the Scriptures received by an active woman. "The insights that Our Lord has given me into Scripture did not come to me in reading the Bible, but in prayer. This holy Word is a heavenly nourishment which has given and still gives me life by the Holy Spirit, who explains it to me."

Because the great patristic and medieval Tradition considered the Bible a book of life even more than a book of study, stress was placed upon going beyond the letter to the "spiritual sense" of the text. This meant, first of all, carefully to search out with every scientific means possible the meaning of the human author in any given passage or book. But more still was to be sought. The literal sense of any one text was to be enriched by relating it, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to other passages of the Scriptures, to the entire revelation received by the Church, and to the personal and communal needs of one's times. The long tradition of interpreting Scripture in this full context gave rise to the famous distych:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*

*The letter teaches what took place,
allegory what to believe,*

*The moral sense what you should do,
anagogy where you are going.*

Pere Henri de Lubac has described and documented better than anyone the centuries long tradition of such integral exegesis which extends from Origen (*Histoire et Esprit*, Paris, Aubier, 1950) to the authors of the 13th century (*Exégèse médiévale*, 4 vols., Paris, Aubier, 1959-1964)

When the Scriptures were read, taught and preached in such a way, what we now call exegesis, systematic theology, moral theology, and spirituality were all done simultaneously and in constant encounter with the written Word of God. The development of the various sciences since the 12th and 13th centuries, and especially during the last century and our own, has led to necessary and laudable specialization. Highly refined techniques are now employed in what have become the distinct sciences of exegesis, systematic theology, patristics, moral theology, spirituality, etc. However, the danger of such specialization is that the separate disciplines have little mutual communication, thus remaining closed to complementary insights, and preventing both professors and students from

having a syncretic view of Christian faith and Christian life. As one factor of unification, Vatican II, echoing Leo XIII, stated that Scripture "ought to be the soul of all theology" (*Optatam Totius*, 16). With characteristic insight, Father Raymond Brown has suggested that just as during the first forty years of the 20th century the Roman Catholic Church was negative towards biblical criticism, and then during the next thirty years came to recognize many of its positive aspects, so in the final years of this century the Church will be coming to grips "with the impact of biblical criticism on the Roman Catholic understanding of doctrine" (Raymond E. Brown, *Crises Facing the Church*, New York, Paulist Press, 1975, p.8). One can only hope that this will be so. I should like to add that it would likewise be desirable that exegetes and representatives of other theological disciplines engage in more dialogue, a necessary condition for realizing the enterprise just mentioned, and that exegetes become more sensitive to the implications of the results of their work for Christian living in the world of our times. The title and concerns of Father Brown's book are an example of such sensitivity.

THE SCRIPTURES AS NORM OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

In her long history the Church has seen the rise and decline of many movements and schools of spirituality. She will see others appear and then disappear, and still other flourish and remain. The Spirit of God blows where and how he wills (see Jn. 3,8). He raises up individual men and women, communities and even vast numbers of persons to respond in creative ways to the needs of the Church and of human society in every age. Life-styles, prayer forms, ways of service, insights into the faith of the Church and into the signs of the times can all be inspired by the Spirit of the Lord. One way to ascertain his presence and activity is to hold up a way of thinking or acting to the mirror of the Scriptures. Whatever is good will always somehow reflect the features of Jesus and so bear the imprint of the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures. In some cases conformity or deformity in respect to the Word of God will be evident. In others careful scrutiny will be required. However, anyone who bears the name of Christ cannot go to the Father except through Jesus (Jn 6,44; 14,9), and the Scriptures are a sure witness to him (Jn 5,39).

For this reason every authentic form of Christian spirituality will be biblical at least in its basic inspiration; every school of Christian spirituality will bear the traits of the Master. Moreover the Bible as a common source and norm provides and maintains the underlying unity of all authentically Christian life-styles whether lived in solitude or in community with others, in celibacy or in marriage.

The Scriptures offer also a means of growth, for the wisdom and grace contained in them are inexhaustible. There is always more to learn about Jesus, his life, his teaching, his disciples. The action of God in his people under both Old and New Covenants can be better perceived and appreciated. The meaning for us of God's Word in the concrete circumstances of our daily lives is ever to be discovered anew. The Scriptures provide a medium for an ongoing dialogue between God and each person, between God and each local community, between God and all his people.

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE NEW COVENANT

"Covenant" was the term used in the Ancient Near East to designate the bond of communion which united one person with another, or one people with another. The people of Israel believed that God made a Covenant with Abraham, with Moses, with David, and finally with the whole people on Sinai during the Exodus. This Covenant was renewed in a very solemn way at the time of King Josiah's reform (2 Kgs 23,1-3) and from time to time in liturgical celebrations. The covenant between individuals or peoples was expressed in solemn words called the covenant treaty. Similarly the Covenant between God and his people was given particular expression in the Decalogue and then in the Mosaic Law.

The words of the Law were considered to be the central part of the entire written Word of God. Indeed the other parts of the books of the Old Testament deal largely with the preparations for Israel's Covenant relationship with God, the history of this relationship, and wisdom teaching based upon the Law. That is why an entire theology can be constructed around the concept of Covenant (e.g. Walter Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament*).



All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy.

(2 Timothy 3:16)

The faithful Israelite kept the words of the Law ever present to the memory in order to meditate upon them and to govern every moment of life by them. While a piety based upon the Law sometimes led to legalistic formalism and shallow hypocrisy, the Law could, on the other hand, inspire and sustain a profound loving relationship with the Lord, a dedication to him of one's entire being and all of one's activities (see Dt 6,4-9 and Psalm 119).

When God promised through the prophets that he would make a New Covenant with his people, he promised as well that he would put his Law within them and write it upon their hearts (Jer 31,33). He would give them a new heart and even place his own Spirit within them thus enabling them to be faithful to his commandments (Ez 36,26-27).

The disciples of Jesus believe that the New Covenant was established by means of his Paschal Mystery. Through his loving obedience to the Father's will and his love for His own unto the end (Jn 13,1), Jesus merited for us the gift of his own Spirit. The Incarnate Word, pierced upon the Cross, became the source of the sacraments which create and nourish the Christian community (Jn 19,30-37).

The risen Jesus present in every age to his followers who believe in him and love him even though they have not seen him (Jn 20,29; 1Pt 1,8) is the one whom they remember as they celebrate the mystery of his Body and Blood and as they contemplate the Scriptures which witness to him. A treasure ever old and ever new (Mt. 13,52), the Scriptures which speak of Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13,8) are the "pure and perennial source of spiritual life" (*Dei Verbum*, 21).

If in Jerome's words "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," a knowledge of them which is based upon sound science and living faith provides us with one of the most efficacious means we have "to know Christ more clearly, love him more dearly, follow him more nearly." What John said of his Gospel could be said of the entire Bible. The signs narrated "are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20,31).

The Sacred Scriptures therefore not only reveal what New Covenant communion with God is. By the action of the Holy Spirit they draw us into this communion by evoking a response of faith and love to the Father revealed in Jesus, priest and mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 8).

THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS

The God revealed to us by the Scriptures is a God of love: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34,6). Indeed his very name is Love (1 Jn 4,8.16). The entire revelation contained in the Scriptures can be synthesized in the form of the two commandments to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind" (Mt 22,37; Dt 6,5), and to love one another as Jesus has loved us (Jn 13,34; 15,12; comp. Lv 19,17).

The Christian life, Christian spirituality, is always to be judged by the criterion of love, for that is how we will be judged by our King (Mt 25,31-46). The Word of God has as its principal purpose to reveal love to us and to enable us to live a life of love. Contact with the Scriptures results in the purification and transformation of our attitudes and our actions so that they may become the attitudes and actions of Christ himself. The same Jesus who prayed in desert places (Mk 1,35; Lk 4,42), who had compassion on the crowds of people he saw (Mt 9,36), who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Act 10,38) wishes today to pray in us, and to reach out to others in compassion through us so that they too may know the healing power of the one who loved each of us, and gave himself up for each of us (Gal 2,20).

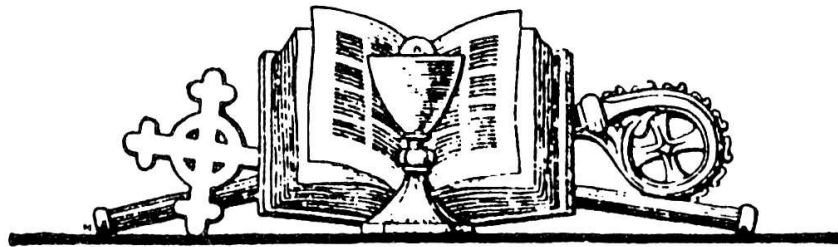
By keeping the commandment of love for others, we keep the commandment of love for the Father, as Jesus did (see Jn 14,31; 15,10; 1 Jn 4,20-21; 5,2-3). Even now, through the Sacred Scriptures, and in other ways, Jesus continues to reveal the Father to us so that we may live lives filled with the Father's love and thus be icons of the presence of Jesus: "I have made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them (Jn 17,26)."

CONCLUSION

A living relationship of faith and love with Jesus, the Father, and our fellow human beings, in the Holy Spirit, through the gift of the Word of God, is the most intimate form of communication possible on this earth between God and human persons. So that faith and love can continually grow, the Word of God continues to nourish us. Indeed according to Tradition, the Scriptures themselves "grow" to the degree that they are understood and lived.

By means of the Word, in this life we, "beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to

another" (2 Cor 3,18). But the day will come when the Scriptures themselves will disappear. For when Jesus appears again, we will have no further need of a written Word. We shall contemplate face to face (1 Cor 13,12) the Eternal and Incarnate Word of the Father, as he is, in his glory, and we will become still more like him ... God's children forever (1 Jn 3.2; Jn 17,24).



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