

# LIFE IN CHRIST



**focus**  
fellowship of catholic  
university students



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## Chapter II

# Sacred Scripture

### UNDERSTANDING

*(for your preparation as a leader)*

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### DISCUSSION

*(to use with your group)*

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

## Ignorance of Scripture is Ignorance of Christ (Luke 24:13-27)

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus... While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Clopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him....And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk 24:13-27).*

Put yourself in the shoes of these early disciples. You have just witnessed the crucifixion of the man you thought was going to lead your people as the long-awaited messiah king. Now, he has been put to death, and you are walking home, discouraged. Suddenly, someone you don't recognize comes along beside you and begins asking questions about what has happened. You explain your sad tale, your shattered hope, and a few perplexing reports. And what does he do? Comfort and support you? No! He rebukes you and, surprisingly, launches into a Bible study! It's not a short one either: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27).

Of course, the person these disciples encountered isn't just anyone—we know it is Jesus, risen from the dead. This forces us to ask an important question: Of all the things that Jesus could have done, why did He spend so much time interpreting all of the Scriptures to these disciples? He could have revealed His glory or performed some miracle. Instead, he slowly and painstakingly reveals the truth about Himself in the Scriptures.

This isn't the only time Jesus does this either. He does it again just a few short verses later. In the very next scene in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appears to His disciples again, mysteriously entering the locked room in which they are staying. He "open[s] their minds to understand the Scriptures, and [says] to them, 'Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead'" (v. 44-46). Again, we must ask ourselves, why are the Scriptures so important to Jesus?

St. Jerome, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century Biblical scholar, points us toward an answer when he writes, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." We might think of many ways of coming to know Jesus—listening to a good Christian podcast, watching a YouTube video, receiving the sacraments, or spending time in prayer. However, if we want to know

Jesus deeply and personally, then Sacred Scripture is essential. It is in the Scriptures that we learn the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is in the Scriptures that we come to understand how Christ's coming was foretold in the Old Testament. And it is in the Scriptures that people today, two-thousand years later, can hear God speaking to them now. This is the point Jesus seems to be driving home in these passages: if we want to know Him, we must listen to His Word.

**Divine Inspiration: Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us (Luke 24:28-32)**

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Lk 24:28-32).*

"Did not our hearts burn within us?" (Lk 24:32). As these disciples reflect on their encounter with the risen Christ, they are amazed at how Scripture moved their hearts. Have you ever experienced this? Have you ever heard something that was so powerful, so beautiful, that your heart was moved with tremendous emotion? That's what these disciples must have experienced—and to a tremendous degree! The message was simply overwhelming.

These early disciples experienced the power of God's Word. The book of Hebrews tells us, "For the word of God 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" (Hebrews 4:12). We can see this transforming power at work in many examples throughout the history of the Church:

St. Anthony of the Desert heard the words of the Gospel, "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," and he proceeded to sell everything he had to pursue holiness and live a life of prayer in the desert (Mt 19:21).

Wrestling with his sinfulness and the prospect of becoming a Christian, St. Augustine read, "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh" (Rom 13:13-14). These verses propelled him to finally leave his sin behind and follow Christ.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, prodded St. Francis Xavier to conversion with Jesus's words, "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36).

Truly, the Scriptures are powerful in turning hearts toward Christ. Why are the Scriptures so powerful? Why are they so unique in their ability to move hearts? One word: inspiration. The Bible is different than any other book. Other books might claim to teach something about God or how to live a holy life. However, only the Bible is written by God Himself. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy states, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,

for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). The word inspired in Greek is *theópneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed" (see CCC 105). Just as our breath moves over our vocal cords to make the sounds needed for speech, God's "breath" brings forth the words of Sacred Scripture. Indeed, the Scriptures contain God's own divine Word, communicated to us through the human words of the inspired authors. That is why the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and many saints throughout the centuries were so deeply impacted by the Scriptures: they were listening to God's own Word.

Hearing God's voice in the Scriptures isn't only for saints from a bygone generation, either. It is something we can do every day. When we prayerfully read the Scriptures, we converse with God Himself. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, "in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them" (DV 21).

Furthermore, reading the Scriptures leads to a vibrant practice of the Faith. For the disciples on the road, the Scriptures led them to the Eucharist, and in the Eucharist they "recognized" Christ (v. 31, 35). How frequently do we hear people today say, "I didn't get anything out of Mass."? Often, people struggle to recognize Jesus' Eucharistic Presence because they haven't deeply listened to God's Word in Scripture. Indeed, the written Word, Sacred Scripture, prepares us to receive the Word Made Flesh, the Eucharist. The two belong together.

### **The Trustworthiness of God's Word**

There's another reality we must consider as we ponder God's inspired Word. Because Scripture is inspired, it is also inerrant. This means that "the books of Scripture [teach] solidly, faithfully and without

error” (DV 11). God is Truth; He cannot and does not lie. He is a loving Father, who wishes to guide His sons and daughters into the truth. In fact, the Father sent His Son into the world to “bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). Therefore, we can be confident that God’s Word is totally without error. In the words of the Catechism, “God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of his word in all things” (CCC 215).

In our study of Sacred Scripture, however, it is not uncommon to encounter difficulties—language we don’t understand, stories we find difficult to grasp, and even statements that we struggle to reconcile with what we know to be true. What should we do when we encounter these difficulties? Where can we turn when we have trouble perceiving the truth in a particular passage? The Church has wrestled with these kinds of questions for centuries. That’s why She gives us several principles to guide us in our study of God’s Word. Let’s consider a few of these principles, so that we know how to proceed when we encounter difficult passages in Sacred Scripture.

One essential principle for interpreting not only Scripture, but any text, is understanding the intention of the author. If we aren’t paying attention to an author’s intended meaning, then we are likely to misinterpret his or her writing. This is certainly true of Sacred Scripture. The Bible is truly God’s Word, but it didn’t just fall out of the sky. It was written by inspired human authors—authors who wanted to say something specific to their intended audiences. Therefore, we must pay careful attention to the Sacred authors’ intentions when interpreting God’s Word. The Catechism states, “to interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal by their words” (CCC 109). In other words, while the Holy Spirit certainly



inspired the authors of Sacred Scripture, these human authors were real authors with a real message that they intended to share with the people to whom they were writing.

By discovering the author's intention, we can better understand the intended meaning of a passage. Consider a modern example: When a weatherman today says, "The sun will rise at 6:30am," he isn't making a scientific claim about the sun rising and falling. Even less is he attempting to refute the Copernican system of astronomy. Instead, he is simply using colloquial language to describe an everyday occurrence. To understand the weatherman's meaning, we must be aware of what he is intending to say.

The same is true of Sacred Scripture. Scripture is full of historical, cultural, and literary elements that the inspired human authors employed to communicate their message. Therefore, to interpret a passage correctly, we must pay careful attention to these elements to determine the author's intended meaning. Think, for example, about the various literary forms employed in Sacred Scripture: poetry, historical narrative, biography, apocalyptic, sayings of wisdom, songs, and more. If an author is using the literary form of poetry, then that tells us something about the author's intended meaning. It isn't likely that he or she would employ a poetic style to communicate a precise historical narrative.

Similarly, sometimes we need to pay attention to historical or cultural idioms in the text. For example, today we might say something like, "That car is a lemon." By saying this, we don't mean that the car is literally full of juice and pulp. Similarly, words or phrases that appeared in Hebrew or Greek texts thousands of years ago often had unique meanings during that time and in that culture. Therefore, to interpret Biblical passages correctly, we need to understand the

expressions the human authors are using. In these instances, the Biblical text is not in error; we simply need to learn what the author intended to say. While most of us are not Greek or Hebrew scholars, we can use tools like study Bibles, concordances, and commentaries to help us understand key words or phrases.

We can summarize these Biblical principles in the words of Pope Pius XII who wrote, “For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, ‘except sin,’ so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, just as Jesus Christ really and truly took on human flesh without relinquishing His divinity, so too the words of God in Sacred Scripture take up human language without losing their divine authority and inerrancy. The words of Scripture are truly fully human and fully divine.

Finally, we must approach God’s Word with humility. St. Augustine says of Scripture, “Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride.”<sup>2</sup> There isn’t a problem with Sacred Scripture simply because we are having difficulties. When a passage is challenging, God is humbling us and inviting us to ponder more deeply. It’s okay, even good, to ask difficult questions about the Scriptures. But we must also be willing to put effort into discovering the answers to those questions. Often, those passages we find most perplexing can become spiritually enlightening if we are willing to do the hard work of patiently seeking its meaning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, par. 20. Accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_30091943\\_divino-afflante-spiritu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html)

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book II. Accessed at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12022.htm>, January 25, 2022.

## Renewing Our Minds: A Catholic Imaginative Vision

We live in a world full of many (and often contradictory) ideas about the most important aspects of our lives: what it means to be human, how we should live, the nature of love, and the reality of God. This presents a challenge for us as Christ's disciples. As disciples, we are called to have a Catholic imaginative vision, that is to see all things as Christ sees them. The book of Ephesians states that God desires to "make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God" (Eph 3:9). Similarly, St. Paul says that Christians should "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). These passages reveal that thinking rightly, having the right vision of the world is necessary for faithful discipleship.

As Christian disciples, we are blessed with the gift of Faith. Faith not only gives us knowledge of Divine Revelation (the Trinity, the Incarnation, Eternal Life, etc.) but also our day-to-day experiences—our work, our leisure, our suffering, our family, our past and our future—are made clearer in its light (CCC 153). Consider these words from the Catholic apologist Frank Sheed:

*[I]t is not...enough that we should see the same thing as other people plus the things the Church teaches. Even the things that we and they both see will not look the same or be the same; because what the Church teaches affects even the things already in the landscape, the things of ordinary experience. It is like a physical landscape at sunrise: it is not that you see the same things that you saw before and now find yourself seeing the sun as well. You see everything sun-bathed. Similarly it is not a case of seeing the same universe as other people and then seeing God over and above. For God is at the centre*

*of the being of everything whatsoever. If we would see the universe aright, we must see it GOD-bathed.*<sup>3</sup>

Yet how often do we allow our minds to be truly enlightened by Faith? Instead, don't we frequently turn to the world to shape our minds, imbibing a vision of reality produced by movies, TikTok, Netflix, Instagram, and popular news programs? These forms of media often tell us a different story—that what will really make us happy is money, fame, sex, and power; that what matters is getting something for ourselves, not sacrificing for others; that life ought to be easy, not difficult; that we must live for this world, not the next. By constantly subjecting our minds to these false narratives, we slowly and subtly begin to embrace them. We start to tell ourselves a different story about reality, “exchang[ing] the truth of God for a lie” (Rom 1:25).

How can we resist these false narratives and see the world in the light of Faith? How can we acquire a Catholic imaginative vision? In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). Daily renewal of the mind is the habit we need in order to gain a Catholic imaginative vision and avoid worldly ways of thinking.

As disciples seeking to cultivate this vision, there is no better place for us to turn than to God's Word. In the Scriptures, we read the real story, the true Gospel, the one narrative that enables us to think with the mind of Christ. Just imagine what would happen if instead of filling our minds with the world's falsehoods we dedicated ourselves to reading God's Word? Let's not waste our time being steeped in worldly thinking. Let's renew our minds and embrace a Catholic imaginative vision by turning to Sacred Scripture.

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<sup>3</sup> Sheed, Frank. *Theology and Sanity*, Catholic Way Publishing: London, England (2019). p. 15.

## Scripture in the Christian Life (Psalm 1:1-2)

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night* (Ps 1:1-2).

These are the first words of the wisdom literature in the Bible (i.e., Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach, Ecclesiastes). They point us to the very heart of forming our minds and growing in divine wisdom: the habit of reading the Scriptures “day and night.” If we seek to take on the mind of Christ, then the daily reading of Sacred Scripture is essential. Indeed, “The Church ‘forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn “the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,” by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures” (CCC 133).

There is a line from the Second Vatican Council that should inspire us to embrace this daily devotion to Sacred Scripture. It reads, “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord” (DV 21). This is a powerful statement; one we should strive to make our own. Can we say with the Church, “I reverence the Scriptures just as I venerate the body of the Lord?” Does that statement ring true for you? Or do you find yourself squeamish about being so devoted to the Scriptures? If someone looked at your life, would they see that you reverence both the Eucharist and the Scriptures? Could they observe that you are someone who regularly reads Sacred Scripture by the way you live, by the way you speak?

## **(Optional) Mary's Devotion to Scripture**

One figure in Sacred Scripture models this great devotion to Scripture: Mary. When she heard God's Word, the Scriptures tell us she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). Not only this, but in her song of praise, the Magnificat, we observe that Mary's devotion to Scripture is so detailed, so intense, that the words of Scripture have become her own (Lk 1:46-55). Scholars note, literally, dozens of Biblical quotes and allusions in these few verses. Pope Benedict XVI writes of Mary and her Magnificat,

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.*

*Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God (Verbum Domini 28).*

Let us be like Mary. Let us ponder God's Word in our hearts. Let's immerse ourselves so deeply in God's Word that it starts to become

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Passages: Luke 24:13-32, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 12:2, Psalm 1:1-2, Luke 1:46-55*

## Introduction

1. Launching Question: Can you think of a time when you came to a place of understanding because someone taught you something you didn't know? How did that change your life?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Please read aloud:* Last time we looked at the call of Simon and the cost of saying “yes” to the invitation of the Lord. Today, we’ll be looking at one the of the essential elements of building a life of discipleship with the Lord: Sacred Scripture.

## Ignorance of Scripture is Ignorance of Christ

*Read Luke 24:13-27*

2. Put yourself in the shoes of these early disciples. You have just witnessed the crucifixion of the man you thought was going to

lead your people as the long-awaited messiah king. Now, he has been put to death, and you are walking home, discouraged. Suddenly, someone you don't recognize comes along beside you and begins asking questions about what has happened. You share your sadness and how does he respond?

*Answer: Comfort and support you? No! He rebukes you and, surprisingly, launches into a Bible study! It's not a short one either: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27).*

3. Of course, the person these disciples encountered isn't just anyone—we know it is Jesus, risen from the dead. This forces us to ask an important question: Of all the things that Jesus could have done on Easter Sunday, why did He spend so much time interpreting all of the Scriptures to these disciples?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Please read aloud:* This isn't the only time Jesus does this either. He does it again just a few short verses later. In the very next scene, Jesus appears to His disciples and he "open[s] their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Lk 24:45). Again, we must ask ourselves, why are the Scriptures so important to Jesus?

4. As Christians we have prayer and the sacraments, as well as fellowship as integral parts of our life. Why is it so important to also engage deeply with Scripture? What do you think we miss about Jesus if we do not read and come to deeply know the Scriptures?



*Answer: We might think of many ways of coming to know Jesus—listening to a good Christian podcast, watching a YouTube video, receiving the sacraments, or spending time in prayer. However, if we want to know Jesus deeply and personally, then Sacred Scripture is essential. It is in the Scriptures that **we learn the story** of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is in the Scriptures that we come to understand how Christ's coming was foretold in the Old Testament. And it is in the Scriptures that people today, two-thousand years later, can hear God speaking to them now. This is the point Jesus seems to be driving home in these passages: **if we want to know Him, we must listen to His Word**. St. Jerome, the great 4th century Biblical scholar, writes, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."*

## **Divine Inspiration**

*Please read aloud:* Let's keep reading so we can unpack the power of Scripture in our lives.

*Read Luke 24:28-32*

5. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" (v. 32). Have you ever experienced this before? Have you ever heard something that was so powerful, so beautiful, that your heart was moved with tremendous emotion? What was it?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Please read aloud:* These early disciples experienced the power of God's Word. The book of Hebrews tells us, "For the word of God 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” (Hebrews 4:12).

*Note to the Leader: Feel free to read Hebrews 4:12 together.*

6. We can see this transforming power at work in many hearts throughout the history of the Church. How has Scripture impacted your life? Or can you think of examples of lives that were drastically changed because of the power of the Word of God?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Answer: Note to leader – feel free to share a personal story. Please also share at least one example from the following: St. Anthony of the Desert, St. Augustine. St. Ignatius of Loyola. See Leader’s Guide for their stories.*

*Please read aloud:* Why are the Scriptures so powerful? Why are they so unique in their ability to move hearts? One word: inspiration. The Bible is different than any other book. Other books might claim to teach something about God or how to live a holy life. However, only the Bible is written by God Himself.

Let’s read what St. Paul says about this:

*Read 2 Timothy 3:16*

7. What stands out to you from this verse? What does it mean that Scripture is inspired by God?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Answer: The word inspired in Greek is theópneustos, which literally means “**God-breathed**” (see CCC 105). Just as our breath moves over our vocal cords to make the sounds needed for speech, God’s “breath” brings forth the words of Sacred Scripture. Indeed, the Scriptures contain God’s own divine Word, communicated to us through the human words of the inspired authors. That is why the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and many saints throughout the centuries were so deeply impacted by the Scriptures: they were **listening to God’s own Word**.*

8. How might the inspiration of Scripture impact our relationship with God? What does it mean for our practice of the Faith, especially in the Mass?

*Allow group to discuss.*

*Answer: Hearing God’s voice in the Scriptures isn’t only for saints of old. It is something we can do every day. When we prayerfully read the Scriptures, **we converse with God Himself**. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them” (DV 21).*

*Reading the Scriptures leads to a vibrant practice of the Faith. When we are familiar with the Scriptures, we will **perceive the works of God** in our life, confident that we know the sound of his voice and the character of his acts. Additionally, for the disciples on the road, the Scriptures led them to the Eucharist, and in the Eucharist they “recognized” Christ (v. 31, 35). Often, people struggle to recognize Jesus’ Eucharistic Presence because*

*they haven't deeply listened to God's Word in Scripture. Indeed, the written Word, Sacred Scripture, prepares us to receive the Word Made Flesh, the **Eucharist**. The two belong together.*

## **The Trustworthiness of God's Word**

*Please read aloud:* We just made some bold claims about Scripture: it's inspired, it's transformative, God actually speaks to us through it. Let's add another claim: because it is written by God, everything contained in Scripture is true. It is "*inerrant*" meaning "the books of Scripture [teach]...without error" (*Dei Verbum* 11). In the words of the Catechism, "God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of his word in all things" (CCC 215).

But this may be a hard claim because you may have encountered some confusing or difficult passages in Scripture. We might even find language we don't understand or statements we struggle to reconcile with what we know to be true. What do we do when we encounter these difficulties? Let's unpack this a little more.

9. Scripture is written by *human* authors who are inspired by God. When we read any text that's from a different historical or cultural context, what kinds of things do we need to take into account? For example, how might a poetic writing style or the historical situation in the ancient world thousands of years ago impact the way you read a text today?

*Answer: We ought to take into account the historical, cultural, and literary context as well as idioms, use of words, and the human author's intended meaning of words.*

10. Some say the Bible is more of a library than a book. There are at least 35 human authors of the 73 biblical books and many genres (poetry, narrative, historical, apocalyptic, songs, prophetic, letter, etc.). If you take these things into consideration when you read any other text, how should we engage with them in Scripture? What kinds of things should we be mindful of, especially when we encounter difficulties in the text?

*Answer: The Catechism states, "to interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal by their words" (CCC 109). While the Holy Spirit certainly inspired the authors of Sacred Scripture, these human authors were real authors with a real message. By discovering the author's **intention**, we can better understand the intended meaning of a passage.*

*The elements of the author's intention can be considered in its historical, cultural, and literary **context**. To interpret a passage correctly, we must pay careful attention to these elements to determine the author's **intended meaning**. Sacred Scripture employs a variety of literary forms that should be approached differently. We should be especially mindful of words or phrases that were used in ancient Hebrew and Greek often had unique meanings in that time and culture. Therefore, to interpret Biblical passages correctly, we need to understand the expressions the human authors are using in their right context.*

*Please read aloud:* Sacred Scripture, like the Church and like Jesus himself, is fully divine and fully human. In the words of Pope Pius XII, "As the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, 'except sin,' so the words of God, expressed in human language,

are made like to human speech in every respect, except error.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, just as Jesus Christ really and truly took on human flesh without relinquishing His divinity, so too the words of God in Sacred Scripture take up human language without losing their divine authority and inerrancy. The words of Scripture are truly fully human and fully divine! Our Faith is incarnational!

11. Understanding that Scripture is both fully human and fully divine should impact the way we read it. That said, we also need to have the right disposition of heart. With what disposition should we approach the Biblical text, even passages that are difficult?

*Answer: We must approach God's Word with **humility**. St. Augustine says of Scripture, “Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride.”<sup>2</sup> There isn't a problem with Sacred Scripture simply because we are having difficulties. When a passage is challenging, God is humbling us and inviting us to **ponder** more deeply. It's okay, even good, to ask difficult questions about the Scriptures. But we must also be willing to **put effort** into discovering the answers to those questions. Often, those passages we find most perplexing can become spiritually enlightening if we are willing to do the hard work of patiently seeking its meaning with the help of the Holy Spirit.*

## Renewing Our Minds: A Catholic Imaginative Vision

*Please read aloud:* We live in a world full of many (and often contradictory) ideas about the most important aspects of our lives:

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, par. 20. Accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_30091943\\_divino-afflante-spiritu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html)

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book II. Accessed at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12022.htm>, January 25, 2022.

what it means to be human, how we should live, the nature of love, and the reality of God. This presents a challenge for us as Christ's disciples. We are called to have a Catholic imaginative vision, that is to see all things as Christ sees them. A Catholic mind, when renewed by grace, will look and think differently than a mind formed by our culture or this world.

Faith is a gift, and it is a "light" that shines and reveals the reality of things to us (CCC 153). Consider these words from the Catholic apologist Frank Sheed:

*[[I]t is not...enough that we should see the same thing as other people plus the things the Church teaches. Even the things that we and they both see will not look the same or be the same; because what the Church teaches affects even the things already in the landscape, the things of ordinary experience. It is like a physical landscape at sunrise: it is not that you see the same things that you saw before and now find yourself seeing the sun as well. You see everything sun-bathed. Similarly it is not a case of seeing the same universe as other people and then seeing God over and above. For God is at the centre of the being of everything whatsoever. If we would see the universe aright, we must see it GOD-bathed.<sup>3</sup>*

12. How do things like movies, social media, Netflix, news, etc. affect how we think about the world and ourselves? How might Scripture, in contrast, better equip us to have a Catholic imaginative vision?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Answer: Media is one of the greatest forces working to **shape our minds** and the way we think. Movies, TikTok, Netflix, Instagram, and popular news programs – these types of media often tell us a **different story** than what is true—that what will really make us*

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<sup>3</sup> Sheed, Frank. *Theology and Sanity*, Catholic Way Publishing: London, England (2019). p. 15.

*happy is money, fame, sex, and power; that what matters is getting something for ourselves, not sacrificing for others; that life ought to be easy, not difficult; that we must live for this world, not the next.*

*When taking on the mind of Christ, there is no better place for us to turn than to God's Word. In the Scriptures, we read the real story, the true Gospel, the one narrative that enables us to think with the mind of Christ. Just imagine what would happen if instead of filling our minds with the world's falsehoods we dedicated ourselves to reading God's Word? Let's not waste our time being steeped in worldly thinking. Let's renew our minds and embrace a Catholic imaginative vision by turning to Sacred Scripture.*

13. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." How have you experienced a transformation of your mind because of your faith in Jesus? What steps do you need to take to continue to allow Scripture to shape your thinking instead of the world?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

## **Scripture in the Christian Life**

*Read Psalm 1:1-2*

*Please read aloud:* These are the first words of the wisdom literature in the Bible (i.e., Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach, Ecclesiastes). They point us to the very heart of forming our minds and growing in divine wisdom: the habit of reading the Scriptures "day and night." If we seek to take on the mind of Christ, then the daily reading of Sacred Scripture is essential (CCC 133).



There is a line from the Second Vatican Council that should inspire us to embrace this daily devotion to Sacred Scripture. It reads, “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord” (DV 21). This is a powerful statement; one we should strive to make our own.

14. Do you venerate the Scriptures in this way? How would you describe your current devotion to Scripture? Do you ponder God’s word “day and night”? If someone looked at your life, would they see that you reverence both the Eucharist and the Scriptures? Could they observe that you are someone who regularly reads Sacred Scripture by the way you live, by the way you speak?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

### **(Optional) Mary’s Devotion to Scripture**

*Please read aloud:* One figure in Sacred Scripture models this great devotion to Scripture: Mary. Pope Benedict XVI wrote the following words about Mary at the Annunciation when she proclaims her Magnificat, which includes dozens of Biblical citations,

*Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God (Verbum Domini 28).*

*Note to the Leader: Feel free to read Mary’s Magnificat together, if desired: Luke 1:46-55.*

15. What could you do to be more like Mary and have a greater devotion to Scripture? How would your life be different if you truly meditated on God's word like she did?

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Please read aloud:* Let us be like Mary. Let us ponder God's Word in our hearts. Let's immerse ourselves so deeply in God's Word that it starts to become our word, so that our thoughts become imbued with the thoughts of God. Indeed, let's be so devoted to Sacred Scripture, reading it "day and night," that our minds, our hearts, and our lives are transformed.

