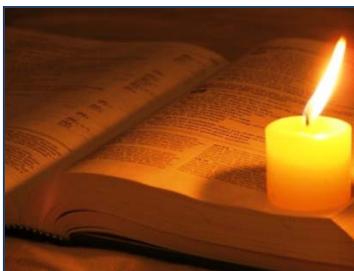


**ENCOUNTERING THE HEART OF CHRIST IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES OF THE CHURCH:  
AN INTRODUCTION TO A SPIRITUAL READING OF THE BIBLE AND TO THE PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA***

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According to St. Jerome and the living Tradition of the Church, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (CCC 133; DV 25). Stated positively, to know the Scriptures as the Church knows them means to know Christ and the power of God who gives us eternal life (cf. Mt 22:29; Rom 1:16). In the deepest recesses of our hearts, all of us desire to know Christ, to experience his love for us, to love him, to be one with him. In a word, we all desire to pray. The goal of prayer is union with Christ who reveals to us the Father and his love and brings to light our most high calling (cf. CCC 1701; GS 22). In prayer we discover who we are and the path we are called to walk together as children of God (cf. Jn 1:12-13; Eph 5:8). Christ has prayed for our union with him and the Father and for our union with each other in the Holy Spirit: “I pray [. . .] that they may all be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us [. . .] so that they may be one as we are one.” (Jn 17:20.21.22; cf. Rom 8:1.15-17). As we mature in prayer we grow in unity as God’s family. Because prayer is a human act, it involves our sentiments, dispositions, and intellectual faculties, and ultimately flows through the spiritual maturity of our character. At times we may experience Christ’s presence, his gentleness and peace, his joy. At other times we may experience interior dryness, darkness, distraction, and even thoughts and feelings of desperation as we are faced with the difficulties of life – unemployment, regret, betrayal, anger and resentment toward others, terminal illness, social injustice, anxiety, cultural disarray. As we grow in the virtues of Christian prayer, we are able to perceive that spiritual dryness and desolations are purgative gifts inviting our hearts to cry out for the living God (cf. Ps 84:2): to hunger for the “living bread that came down from heaven” (Jn 6:51); to thirst for the living waters of the Spirit (cf. Jn 7:38-39); to rest in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord (cf. Mt 11:28-30). We hunger, thirst, and long for Christ. We long to pray.

**CHRIST INVITES US TO KNOW HIM IN THE SCRIPTURES**



In the context of the human vocation to know and love God (cf. CCC 1), the Sacred Scriptures of the Church have a unique authority to make Christ present to us and to communicate the effects of redemption (cf. CCC 45; 141). The surest testimony that this true – that the Scriptures have this unique authority – is the life of Christ. Following his baptism in the Jordan and the temptations in the desert (cf. Mt 3:13–4:11), Jesus returns to Nazareth to inaugurate his messianic ministry. He

goes to the synagogue “according to his custom” (Lk 4:16) to participate in the prayers of the Sabbath, and, in an altogether bold and prophetic fashion, reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (cf. Lk 4:16-17; et al Dt 18:15):

He stood up to read and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to announce the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Rolling up the scroll he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth (Lk 4:18-22; cf. Is 61:1-2; Mal 2:7; Job 22:22; Prov 2:6).

In his inaugural act as the divinely anointed Servant of the Lord, Jesus reads and fulfills the Scriptures. In his hands and through his heart and voice the Bible becomes a living, prophetic testimony about the Father’s plan of redemption and the messianic mission Jesus is sent to accomplish: “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This simple event in the synagogue of Nazareth reveals that the Scriptures permeated Jesus’ interiority, directed his prayer, and filled his preaching. As the Gospels testify, Christ dies praying the Scriptures on the Cross: “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; cf. Ps 22:2); “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46; Ps 31:6). For all of us, as his disciples, Christ is the “way” (Jn 14:6). He suffered for us, leaving us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps (cf. 1 Pt 2:21). The Scriptures trace the path of his heart. They are impressed in his soul, totally fulfilled, totally interpreted, totally alive. He inspired them, and he has prayed them. For our own sake, the Scriptures have a unique charism – a gift of the Holy Spirit which builds up the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-6) – to teach, correct, and heal us, to train us in righteousness (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). By reading the prophet Isaiah in the Synagogue of Nazareth, re-reading the law of Moses in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5–7), and praying the psalms as he hung on the Cross, Jesus is teaching us something very important about his own prayer and how we ought to pray as his disciples: he is inviting us to discover him, to encounter him, and to learn to recognize him in the Scriptures – to know him and “the power of God” (Mt 22:29).

#### THE WRITTEN WORD IS AT THE SERVICE OF THE SPIRIT

How do we encounter Christ in the Scriptures? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that God is “the author of Sacred Scripture” and “inspired the human authors of the sacred books” (CCC 105-106). These sacred books “teach the truth” (CCC 107). The Bible has a privileged capacity to guide us on the path of salvation so that we can profess with the whole Church: “we have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). At the same time, as Catholics, it is important for us to remember that “Christianity is not a religion of the book” but “the religion of the Word” (CCC 108). This means that the literal meaning of the text is not the ultimate meaning of Scripture. To read the Bible means to encounter Christ, the living, eternal Word of God, and to grow in union with him. For this to happen according to the Church, which is the “pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Tim



3:15), we must read Scripture respecting the “sacred author’s intention” (CCC 116) and, most importantly, praying “in light of the same Spirit by whom it was written” (CCC 117). This way of prayerfully reading the Bible is an interior dialogue of our hearts with the Heart of Jesus. It is the same form of dialogue that led the hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus to burn with love and truth when Christ taught them: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32). It is also the same Spirit that the Apostles received in the upper room on the day of the Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:22) and through whom Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45). The written word is at the service of the Spirit who writes the Word in our hearts as we pray.

### THREE CRITERIA FOR A SPIRITUAL READING OF THE BIBLE

Reading the Bible in the Spirit means reading the Bible in the heart of the Church. Over the centuries the Church, like the Blessed Mother, has preserved and kept the Bible in her heart (cf. Lk 2:51) and, as our Mother and Teacher, has handed on the Scriptures to us with a marian spirit. Just as “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14) in the immaculate womb of Our Lady so too the Word became a book in the maternal womb of the Church (cf. VD 19). The Bible is the Church’s book. It logically follows that she is the one who can best teach us how to hold and read and care for the Word. In the long-suffering wisdom of her spiritual maternity, the Church has given three criteria for reading the Bible with the eyes of faith so that we can perceive the spiritual meaning – the living Word – of the Sacred Text: *first, “to be especially attentive to the content and unity of the whole Scripture” (CCC 112); second, to read the Bible “within the living Tradition of the whole Church” (CCC 113); and, third, “to be attentive to the analogy of faith”* – which means, in other words, to hold and honor with total interior fidelity “the coherence of the truths of faith” that God has revealed for our salvation and which the Church has handed on to us with particular clarity in the Creeds (cf. CCC 114). These three criteria form “a road to Emmaus” for our hearts so that we too can encounter the Heart of Jesus in the Bible. It is important, then, that we understand each of them so we can approach the Sacred Text as it truly is: the Word of God who speaks to us today.

#### **1 – ATTENTIVENESS TO THE CONTENT AND UNITY OF THE WHOLE SCRIPTURE**

“Jesus is the center and heart” (CCC 112) of the Bible. As Catholics we venerate the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as the uniquely sacred books of the Church (cf. CCC 120). On the road to Emmaus and in the upper room, the Lord catechized the Apostles by referring to the Sacred Scriptures of the Hebrew people, the Old Testament, which the rabbinical tradition still refers to as “Moses and the prophets” (Lk 24:31). Jesus explained to the Apostles emphatically that “everything that is written about



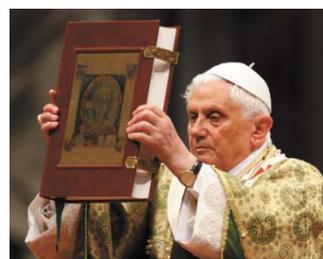
me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44). Clearly the New Testament speaks of Christ, but it is important for us to remember as the Fathers of the Church have taught us based on our Lord’s own words – “everything that is written *about me*” – that the whole Bible, the Old Testament too, speaks of Christ. This is what St. Augustine preached: “You recall that one and the same

Word of God extends throughout Scripture” (CCC 102); and what St. Thomas Aquinas taught: “The phrase ‘heart of Christ’ can refer to Sacred Scripture which makes known his heart, closed before the

Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion” (CCC 112). Christ is the living center of the Old and New Testaments. His Heart pierced on the Cross (cf. Jn 19:34) opens the Scriptures for us, just as the books of Exodus and Zechariah were opened for St. John (cf. Jn 19:36-37; Ex 12:46; Zech 12:10; Rev 1:7) when he witnessed the lance entering Christ’s side and “immediately flowed out blood and water” (Jn 19:32). At that moment St. John beheld the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29.36; cf. 19:36; Is 52:13-53:12). The Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25; 21:20) understood the law and the prophets. Gazing upon the crucified Messiah (cf. 1 Cor 2:2) with the Blessed Mother (cf. Jn 19:25-27) he read the Scriptures in the Spirit – the Word became flesh in his heart. St. John was immersed in love and truth (cf. Jn 14:6; 1 Jn 4:8.16), the same blood and water that nourish and sanctify our hearts as we gaze upon the Scriptures with the interior light of the same Spirit who wrote them. For this reason, in his later years, St. John could write: “The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is the truth. So there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord” (1 Jn 5:6-8). As Catholics we believe that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16) so that through all the words of the Old and New Testaments “God speaks only one single Word” (CCC 102) – and that Word is Christ.

## 2 – READING THE BIBLE WITHIN THE LIVING TRADITION OF THE CHURCH

Although the Bible has been translated into many different languages, it is only truly “written” in one place. “According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the heart of the Church rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture” (CCC 113). We are drawn into the heart of the Church by being immersed in her life and allowing those who have found her heart and guarded it in their own, to guide us. In her autobiography, St. Therese of Lisieux, a doctor of the Church and patroness of the missions, explains her experience of the Church’s heart as she prayed through chapters 12 and 13 of St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians:



Indeed, I knew that the Church had a body composed of various members, but in this body the necessary and more noble member was not lacking; I knew that the Church had a heart and that such a heart appeared to be aflame with love. I knew that one love drove the members of the Church to action, that if this love were extinguished, the Apostles would have proclaimed the Gospel no longer, the martyrs would have shed their blood no more. I saw that love sets off the bounds of all vocations, that love is everything, that this same love embraces every time and every place. In one word, that love is everlasting (*Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol IV, 1451; cf. CCC 826).

The heart of the Church is love, and the saints are living witnesses of the power of this love to transform us. They testify to the truth that “the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us” (Rom 5:5) and that this very love “endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7). By their holiness and zeal for the Gospel, which have been confirmed by the Church, the saints en flesh the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures in their lives with all the uniqueness, gifts, struggles, and transformed weaknesses of their personalities. For this reason, “the saints are the true interpreters of Sacred Scripture” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, March 22, 2010). They have discovered the truth that sets us free (cf. CCC 106-107; Jn

8:32), and they have done so by being immersed in the Sacraments, Scriptures, and devotions of the Church, and with courageous fidelity and heroic love for her teaching authority and for those who have received the office and charism of that authority as successors of the Apostles – the Holy Father and the bishops in communion with him. Living in the heart of the Church is the necessary interior disposition for our own hearts to encounter the love of God which is the mystical heart of the Bible. It is the sure path for us to affirm with the saints, like St. Therese: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love.”

### 3 – ATTENTIVENESS TO THE COHERENCE OF THE TRUTHS OF THE FAITH

To be attentive to the “analogy of the faith” means to approach the Bible with the confident assurance that the truths of the faith as articulated by the Holy Spirit through the Church “will guide [us] into all the truth” (Jn 16:13). Just as we receive the Bible into our hands and into our hearts from the maternal hands and heart of the Church, so too we pray with the Bible according to the faith that she teaches us: God is three divine persons in one nature, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God is “true God and true man,” “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary;” he “suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead” (cf. CCC 422-682). This same Christ builds his Church on the rock of Peter (cf. Mt 16:13-29) and is truly present “body and blood, soul and divinity” in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (cf. Mt 28:20; CCC 1373-1381); the Holy Spirit is “Lord and giver of life” who sustains “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (cf. CCC 811-870). The Creeds of the Church (cf. CCC 185-197), as richly explained for us in the Catechism, are the assurance that our prayer arises from the “same place” (Acts 2:1) as the Apostles, martyrs, and all the saints, and therefore guides us to encounter the true face of Christ – and not someone else. According to Venerable John Paul II, the essence of prayer is “to contemplate the face of Christ with Mary” (RVM 3) his Mother, and our Mother, and Mother of the Church. “In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary” (RVM 10). The Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfectly coherent disciple of Christ: her thoughts, words, and actions perfectly reflect the truth of Her Immaculate Heart. Her glorious Assumption is the perfect crowning of the original grace of her Immaculate Conception – a divine gift entrusted to her freedom and lived as an extraordinary task of co-redemptive suffering so that others may have life. Mary has perfectly kept the “coherence of the truths of the faith” (CCC 114) in Her Immaculate Heart (cf. Lk 2:51). For this reason St. Maximilian Kolbe would often pray to Our Lady with the words attributed to St. Irenaeus (circ. 200 AD): “You alone have destroyed all the heresies in the world.” The Blessed Mother so coherently contemplated the truths of the faith that she conceived the Word of Truth in her immaculate womb. As the prayer of the Angelus reminds us each day, Our Lady attained total interior union with the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). By her “fiat” – her total and unconditional “yes” to God – “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). To pray the Scriptures attentive to the “analogy of faith” is to pray in the school of Her Heart, to allow her to pray through us and in us so the Word becomes flesh in our hearts.

### THE WORD BECOMES FLESH: PRAYING WITH THE BIBLE AS THE CHURCH HAS TAUGHT US – LECTIO DIVINA

“Prayer is the life of a new heart” (CCC 2697). As we pray with the Scriptures we begin to know Christ more deeply, and our hearts long for him. This longing urges us to seek his face with the eyes of faith: “My heart has told me, seek his face” (Ps 27:8). In the living Tradition of the Church a particular



form of biblical prayer has received the repeated confirmation of popes and saints as a sure path to assist us in our “training in holiness” (NMI 32). Referred to by St. Benedict as *lectio divina* or “divine reading,” this simple form of seeking the spiritual meaning of the Bible requires a docile heart, vigilance, and – perhaps most difficult – silence. As Pope Benedict exhorted the youth of the Church, so too are all of us called to be men and women capable of interior

silence so that we may find God in our daily lives:

This is the message I want to share with you today. I ask you to look into your hearts each day to find the source of all true love. Jesus is always there, quietly waiting for us to be still with him and to hear his voice. Deep within your heart, he is calling you to spend time with him in prayer. But this kind of prayer, real prayer, requires discipline; it requires making time for moments of silence every day. Often it means waiting for the Lord to speak. Even amid the “busy-ness” and the stress of our daily lives, we need to make space for silence, because it is in silence that we find God, and in silence that we discover our true self. And in discovering our true self, we discover the particular vocation which God has given us for the building up of his Church and the redemption of our world (Benedict XVI, *Greeting to Youth*, September 18, 2010).

Such disciplined, silent prayer is the “rich soil” (Mt 13:23) for the spiritual reading of Scripture. In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church, *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict again insisted that we make time for prayer, specifying that prayerful silence is the interior home for hearing the word of God and keeping it in our hearts (cf. Lk 11:28): “Let us be silent in order to hear the Lord’s word and to meditate upon it, so that by the working of the Holy Spirit it may remain in our hearts and speak to us all the days of our lives” (VD 124). Put simply, the Holy Father is calling us all to pray with the Scriptures each day by following the step-by-step, time-tested practice of *lectio divina*.

#### THE ESSENTIAL METHOD OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

The essential method of *lectio divina* is to read and re-read a passage of Scripture “at a lingering pace” (RVM 12), each time being more attuned to the specific verses or words through which the Lord seems to speak to us. By meditating on the events and truths that the verses convey we begin to encounter the realities themselves: not simply thinking of an event as it once occurred but assimilating it so that we draw the water of the Spirit “from the wellspring of salvation” (Is 12:3). The interior fruit born of *lectio divina* is usually a gentle, peaceful sense to pause on certain words, images, or phrases and to hold them interiorly. As we hold them they communicate a teaching, a light, a healing to our hearts. Properly discerned, this interior experience is the action of the Holy Spirit leading us “into all truth” (Jn 16:13). Among the sacred books, the Gospels occupy a privileged place in the life of the Church and should be the primary source for our *lectio*. “The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior” (CCC 125). Traditionally, there are four steps to *lectio divina*: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.



### STEP 1 – READING THE TEXT (*LECTIO*)

We can begin our *lectio* by making the sign of the cross and by invoking the Holy Spirit and Our Lady to guide us and speak to us (cf. Jn 16:13). It may be good to make a brief act of contrition and then simply to adore the Lord in silence. If we feel particularly distracted or preoccupied we should surrender our concerns to the Lord and renew our gratitude for the gift of being with him. Our posture should be comfortable yet respectful so that our bodies reflect that we are in God’s presence, who is at once our merciful Father (cf. Lk 15:11-32) and at the same time supremely Holy (cf. Is 6:3). Holding the Bible with humility and care we find the verses that will guide our prayer, typically choosing an event or parable from one of the Gospels (which are easily indicated by subtitles in most contemporary translations). We may decide to pray with one of the readings from Mass that day or another passage, from the Book of Psalms for example. Once we have chosen the text, *we read the verses slowly and deliberately with interior docility to the Holy Spirit*, seeking to compose the context of the event to understand what is actually written. Here we are asking: “*what does the biblical text say in itself?*” Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas” (VD 87). A brief look at the footnotes or a summary of the selected verses may help, especially with a difficult text.

### STEP 2 – MEDITATION (*MEDITATIO*)

“Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged,” asking: “*what does the biblical text say to us?*” (VD 87). As we read the text again we try to be interiorly aware of the words or verses on which we sense to pause or rest, seeking the gentle direction of the Holy Spirit, and we allow the text to confront us: what does the text say to me about my life, my choices, my behavior, our society? Does the text speak to a question or problem at hand? How are my values reflected or corrected by Christ? Here we seek to understand “the why and how of Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking” (CCC 2705).

### STEP 3 – PRAYER (*ORATIO*)

As we pray we ask, “*what do we say to the Lord in response to his word?*” (VD 87). We continue to hold the verses or words that have spoken to us. There, in the silence of our hearts, the Lord teaches and heals, corrects and guides, and we speak with him heart-to-heart: “Lord, it’s true that I have not

forgiven my brother. It seems so difficult, but I want to change. It just doesn't seem possible. Lord Jesus, please forgive me. Teach me to forgive from my heart. I trust in you. I do forgive him. Help me, Lord." This is the essence of the spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture – the actualization of the word in our daily lives. It is the seed of the word, sown in the soil of our hearts and watered by the Spirit (cf. Is 55:10-11), which has matured into a discernible fruit (cf. Gal 5:22-23). A "response to his word" is a marian fiat, a "let it be done" of our hearts where we assent to the teachings of the Gospel: "not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). Here, we ponder the text carefully with Our Lady and, hearing the word, we speak to the Lord in the silence of our hearts. We perceive "a light for our path" (Ps 119:105). "Prayer as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise is the primary way by which the word transforms us" (VD 87).

#### STEP 4 – CONTEMPLATION (*CONTEMPLATIO*)

*Lectio divina* reaches its culmination in contemplation: "the gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love" (CCC 2724). Contemplation is prayer that has become interior union with Christ: "Remain in me as I remain in you" (Jn 15:4). Here "we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality" and "ask ourselves *what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?*" (VD 87). The spiritual fruit of contemplation is peace which results from our resting in the Heart of Jesus through the joyful union of our will with his: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Mt 11:28-30). In these verses Jesus invites us to surrender our own wills – the heavy burden – and to embrace his – the easy yolk and light burden. When we seek, find, and learn from Christ, we find rest. Contemplation leads us to pray with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, for it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I still live my life in the flesh but it is a life of faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20). The soul that attains contemplation has made his or her life a gift to the Lord and allows the Lord to guide him or her in making a sincere gift of self to others. "We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity" (VD 87). In contemplation we pass from the verse or word that is a "light for our path" (Ps 119: 105) into interior union with Light itself. We give thanks to the Lord, desiring to live and share the Good News we have received. On this path, praying in the heart of the Church, we encounter the one whom our hearts love (cf. SS 2:7), and the Spirit writes a new, living translation of the Gospel in us: "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). In this last verse of his Gospel, St. John is referring to us. Gazing at the word of God we discover the Pierced Heart of Jesus: we encounter the living heart and center of Sacred Scripture which the power of God continues to write ever anew in our hearts; and there, in the same heart of the sacred text, we find Mary, Mother of the Word Incarnate: "We find the supreme synthesis and fulfillment of this process in the Mother of God. For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God's word, for she 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart' (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51); she discovered the profound bond which unites, in God's great plan, apparently disparate events, actions and things" (VD 87). Her fiat – her total and unconditional "yes" to the will of God – is the fullness of *lectio divina* and the perfect school for a spiritual reading of the Bible.

LIVING FROM THE WORD IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH: *LECTIO DIVINA*, STUDY OF THE BIBLE, AND THE ROSARY

In this overview we have attempted to present the criteria of the Church for a spiritual reading of the Bible: (1) attentiveness to the content and unity of the Old and New Testaments; (2) reading the Bible within the living Tradition of the Church; and (3) attentiveness to the coherence of the truths of the faith. As Catholics we receive the *Sacred Scriptures of the Church* as inseparably bound to the *faith of the Church*. When we honor these criteria and receive the Scriptures as a sacred gift of the Church to us, we are interiorly disposed to attaining the spiritual meaning of the Bible – of reading the Bible in light of the same Spirit who wrote it so that the same Spirit may continue to write the Scriptures in us. We have also walked through the four steps of *lectio divina* (reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation) as a time-tested, practical method of praying with the Bible – endorsed by the living Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church – so as to attain the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures. It may also be helpful to make two closing suggestions. First, on-going study of the Bible is an essential aid for praying



with the Bible. As we learn more about the Scriptures our desire to understand their particular history and historical context increases. We also become more familiar – more “at home” – with the language and great biblical narratives which reoccur time and time again at various stages of salvation history and become more perceptive of their presence in the life of the Church and in our personal lives. Studying the Bible with the assistance of recommended commentaries and resources enriches our prayer as we are more able to perceive

the unity of Scripture, the continuity of the teachings of Christ with the Old Testament, and the radical and breath-taking novelty of the Gospel. Second, as we study and pray with the Bible on a regular basis, we begin to see the Rosary as a profoundly biblical and explicitly marian form of *lectio divina*. The mysteries of the Rosary become more alive for us, more able to speak to our concrete circumstances, as we understand them as biblical meditations: “Against the background of the words *Ave Maria* [Hail Mary] the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul” (RVM 2). In this way the Rosary becomes a true “compendium of the Gospel” (MC 42) for our daily prayer where we learn “to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother” (RVM 3). As we sit “at the school of Mary” (RVM 1) contemplating the mysteries of the life of Christ, we hold the Rosary as if holding the Scriptures themselves – written perfectly and lived with total coherence in Her Heart. As the beads pass through our fingers, so do the pages of the “sacred books” (CCC 106) pass before the eyes of our hearts, and there, in our souls, in the “inner room” where we are “alone with the Father” (Mt 6:6) the Word that became flesh in the womb of Our Lady (cf. Jn 1:14; Mt 1:23) – the same Word that became a book in the womb of the Church (cf. VD 19) – becomes “life” (1 Jn 1:1-2) and “light” (Jn 8:12) in us (cf. Jn 1:4; 5:24; 11:25-26; 12:25; 14:6; 17:3). In time, these three practices– *lectio divina*, study of the Bible, and recitation of the Rosary – bear a particular, interior fruit so that “we love the Eucharist with the Heart of Our Lady” (Mother Adela Galindo, *Loving the Eucharist with the Heart of Our Lady*, 1), and we long to serve God as she did: “Let it be done unto me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
cf.	confer
Dt	Book of Deuteronomy
DV	Dogmatic Constitution <i>Dei Verbum</i> of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on Divine Revelation
Eph	Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
et al	and other(s)
Ex	Book of Exodus
Gal	Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians
GS	Pastoral Constitution <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on the Church in the Modern World
Is	Book of the Prophet Isaiah
Jn	Gospel of St. John
Job	Book of Job
Lk	Gospel of St. Luke
Mal	Book of the Prophet Malachi
MC	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Marialis Cultus</i> of Pope Paul VI on Marian Devotion
Mt	Gospel of St. Matthew
NMI	Apostolic Letter <i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> of Pope John Paul II at the Beginning of the New Millennium
Prov	Book of Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
Rev	Book of Revelation
Rom	Letter of St. Paul to the Romans
RVM	Apostolic Letter <i>Rosarium Virginis Mariae</i> of Pope John Paul II on the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary
SS	Song of Songs
VD	Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation <i>Verbum Domini</i> of Pope Benedict XVI on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church
Vol	Volume
Zech	Book of the Prophet Zechariah
1 Cor	First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians
1 Jn	First Letter of St. John
1 Pt	First Letter of St. Peter
1 Tim	First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy
2 Tim	Second Letter of St. Paul to Timothy