

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Understanding Scriptures

For many years most Catholics' reading of the Bible was limited to the Sunday gospels and epistles in their Sunday missals, repeated year after year. While limited, this had great value because the yearly repetition of these selected texts, with the yearly exegesis, became part of the spiritual warp and woof of Mass-going Catholics. Since Vatican II there has been a strong encouragement for wider reading of the Scriptures, including a great variety in the new rite of the Mass. This has brought good and bad. Many Catholics have come to know and appreciate the Bible better. Others, oblivious of the complications in biblical interpretation, have misinterpreted the Bible, even to the loss of their Catholic faith.

St. Jerome wrote: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Obviously he did not mean READING the Bible, because most people could not read in his fourth century. He meant that we must understand the message of the Bible, which became commonly presented in sermons, pictures, stained glass windows, plays and the like. General literacy is a late arrival. St. Jerome was the greatest of the early Bible scholars; and he also had a flaming temper. Born in Dalmatia about 340, he studied in Rome, Gaul, Constantinople, and spent his last 33 years in a cave in Bethlehem, adjoining the cave where Christ was born. I had the privilege of celebrating Mass in that very cave-room where he produced the Latin Vulgate, Bible and commentaries, and our pilgrims were thrilled to share in the Mass in this historic room.

There is an agitation by some priests and liturgists to deprive the people of the Mass text in the missalettes. Their theory is, "Let the people LISTEN to the word. Don't let them read the text we are reading." I think they are dead wrong, and for several reasons. First, good pedagogy teaches that we should use as many senses as possible to get a deeper comprehension of a subject. Thus, a medical student must study medical text books as well as listen to his professors' lectures. I do not think God wants us to limit the use of our God-given powers to understand His word.

Second, people should READ the Scripture texts before Mass, and ponder over the possible meanings. If they are deprived of the text, they cannot do this, and this is to their loss.

Third, not all lectors, whether priests or lay persons, are able to be heard and understood. Some because their diction or projection is poor. Some because the acoustics are bad, or badly used. Once I spoke at St. Peter and Paul Church, Elmira, and after

Mass was greeting the people. A woman said dryly, "I liked your sermon, at least as much as I could get. But that wasn't much. I couldn't hear you." I had not used the microphone properly.

It does seem to be a bit smug to think that our proclamation is so good that the people can remember what we read out to them. It is hard enough to retain the vivid parables of the gospels in memory but when one gets into the intricacies of the epistles, e.g., Romans, Galatians, or Isaiah and Revelations, who can remember them from listening? The theory that the Liturgy of the Word is accomplished if a person just sits tight and listens, and the Holy Spirit will work within the soul and give the message, seems to me unhappy egotism. Such is not my own experience. The Church teaches objective truths. When Philip asked the eunuch of Queen Candace who was reading Isaiah, and not getting very far: "Do you understand what you are reading?", the eunuch replied, "How can I understand unless some man show me?" (Acts 8:30-31) To listen is good. To listen and to read is better. To listen and to read and to study prayerfully and intelligently is best. Jesuit Father Charles Gallagher, in his recent retreat to priests at Notre Dame Retreat House, remarked, "Any reading of the Sacred Scriptures which does not lead one to the Eucharist is misreading." I sit at the typewriter in our Webster rectory office thinking, "Imagine how that remark of Father Gallagher will be read — and misread."

Tax Credits Debated in Washington

Albany — The most impressive testimony at the two-day hearings in Washington on Tuition Tax Credit legislation "came from nearly a dozen black and minority parents who were strongly in favor of tuition tax credits," said William P. Gallagher, State Parent Federation executive director.

The hearings, conducted by the subcommittee on Taxation and Debt Management of the Senate Committee on Finance, June 3-4, brought many "favorable comments," Gallagher said.

In his own testimony, Gallagher pointed out:

1. Parents, as prime educators, have a right to choose the educational programs for their children, a right tuition tax credits would guarantee;
2. Tax credits would strengthen competition in education, providing better education for all;
3. All experiences in every nation where government support for nonpublic students has been given show public school education has been strengthened (cited in particular was France).

Gallagher also disputed the claim that tuition tax credits would benefit the wealthy. He used U.S. Census Bureau figures to show that the typical family with children in nonpublic elementary and secondary schools has an income between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

Perhaps the strongest statement made at the hearings, Gallagher said, was the testimony of T.H. Bell, secretary of education, who stated that tuition tax credits would in no way harm public schools.

Although Reagan Administration officials in attendance assured the sponsors of the bill, Sen. Daniel P.

Moynihan and Sen. Robert Packwood, that they would keep the President's promise to push for the legislation, Gallagher felt that some hesitancy arose as to action this congressional session.

The Moynihan-Packwood bill would allow a tax credit of \$250 a year for each student enrolled in a private elementary or secondary school or public or private college or vocational school. The credit would be raised to \$500 effective Aug. 1, 1983.

Others testifying in favor were Rabbi Morris Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America; the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs; the U.S. Catholic Conference; Citizens for Educational Freedom; the Council for American Private Education, and Sen. Alfonse D'Amato.

Among those opposing were Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the League of Women Voters, the American Jewish

Committee and the National Education and Religious Coalition for Public Liberty (PEARL).

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2 from Diocese Take Part in Music Meeting

Latrobe, Pa. — Father Marcellus Earl, OCSO, Abbey of the Genesee, and Brother Pierre Pratte, OSB, of Mt. Savior Monastery, Elmira, attended the eighth biennial meeting of Benedictine musicians at St. Vincent Archabbey here last week.

The meeting provided the musicians with an opportunity to share new liturgical compositions, to discuss musical issues and to gather together to praise God in song.

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