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Scripture

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cyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* clarified that the Bible ought to be studied with the attempt to understand why it was written and for what people.

Vatican II spoke of the believer's responsibility to know the word of God and put it into practice, Halligan said. Its "Constitution on Divine Revelation" stated that access to Scripture "ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful."

Quoting St. Jerome, the council stated, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." It also noted the interconnection of Scripture, church tradition and the magisterium.

So while individuals have been urged to read the Bible, "I don't think anyone is going to go broke handing out a buck in church on Sunday to everybody who read the Bible that week," noted Jesuit Father William J. O'Malley, a theology teacher at Fordham Preparatory School in the Bronx.

It's probably a matter of priorities, he said, adding sharply, "I don't think there are too many people who forget to take a shower."

So the priest, who taught at McQuaid Jesuit High School 1965-87, keeps churning out books like his 26th work, *Matthew, Mark, Luke and You*, published last year, to help stir interest and assist in studying.

"You've got to come at the sayings and stories as if for the first time," he wrote in his introduction. "Let the gospels say what they want to tell you, not the things everybody has always told you they were saying...."

But guidance is helpful, he said from his home in New York. He scorns anyone who would "dump Luke on people as if it is nothing more than 'A Date with Judy.' It's always good to study with somebody who knows more than you."

Reading Scripture and trying to get at its meaning eventually results in the text speaking to the reader and "bringing a whole series of (personal) experience into coalescence," said Father Sebastian Falcone, New Testament scholar and biblical teacher at St. Bernard's Institute.

One example is the Luke 24 story of Jesus walking the road to the village Emmaus with two followers who are puzzling over his death. Only later do they realize the stranger was Jesus himself.

"Beginning to read the Emmaus story, what begins to impact people is the readiness with which we walk away from experiences that have been shattering," Father Falcone said. "We've reduced or restricted the world to a narrow circle of understanding and suddenly realize the need for changing the smallness of our faith landscape."

In his course, "Search for the Authentic Paul," Father Falcone attempts to "clear away barnacles" that held that Paul is impossible to understand and hated women, for instance. Paul was a "fully dedicated dynamic person who understood the basic pull of the Gospel imperative," he said.

Help with reading Scripture is ongoing at various levels across the Diocese of Rochester, whose 1993 Synod named life-long faith formation as its No. 1 goal. The Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, in its fall 1995 adult education packets for parishes, included a piece on reading Scripture, by Father David P. Reid, SSCC.

Not only did parishes from St. Gabriel in Hammondsport to St. Francis of Assisi in Rochester distribute the article, but several hosted talks about reading Scripture and organized Bible studies. And recently Rochester's Corpus Christi Parish offered a three-day parish retreat by author/teacher Ched Myers, who also taught at Auburn's Sacred Heart/St. Ann's Church.

By studying Myers, widely recognized for his exegesis of the Gospel of Mark, as well as his social justice activism, Judy Nichols, pastoral associate for Sacred Heart/St. Ann's, came to see Jesus differently.

"A gong went off in my head," she said. "Jesus, this compassionate man being nice, doing miracles, I saw was challenging social structures, calling people out of their bondage."

According to Mark 1:40, for example, where Jesus healed the leper, Jesus was moved with pity. Nichols said her understanding is that the passage in the original Greek meant, "his guts were churning." When Jesus told the leper to go back to show himself to the priest, he was indicating his anger at the social structure, she said.

"The man not only has a terrible illness and is excluded from his community, but to be back in community he has to offer a gift. And he's poor," Nichols explained.

Parishioners at Sacred Heart also have been exploring the Bible through Little Rock Scripture Study, which offers assignments and videotape discussion.

Several parishioners read Exodus, a book Myers claims lays out the Bible's main plot: God's leading the chosen people from Egypt and their struggle to leave its corrupting influence behind. Then the parishioners shared a potluck and watched the video "Romero," the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador and his assassination in 1980.

"The group was on fire," Nichols said. "We ended up doing an adult forum in April and activism on the School of the Americas." The forum heard a talk on the school in Georgia, whose graduates are said to include Romero's killers. Congressional addresses

were handed out to encourage participants at the forum to write to close the school down.

"It puts things in such perspective," noted group member Pat Donley of the Little Rock program. Some people get wrapped up in "all the diddly stuff" about church, she said, "when the big picture says we all should care about the poor, be courageous, stand up for what we believe in and stand with Jesus, as he stood with the people of his time."

The group's study of Mark, she said, is helping her understand Jesus' true suffering and "that he was as human as we are," despite his divinity.

Her study group has grown close, and proved to be a tremendous support when her daughter, 28, died on I-90 just before Christmas, she said. It held a prayer vigil and was there until her own family members could arrive from out of town.

"I don't know what I would have done without that group after Seanna's death," she said.

Father Reid noted in his "Reading Scripture" article for the diocese, "Just as there is no literary collection without a community, there is no community without constant rereading of the founding story."

He and various teachers of Scripture offer advice, including:

- While Catholics are not restricted to any particular Bible, *The Catholic Study Bible* New American Bible "is a real bargain" with up-to-date introductions for each biblical book, Halligan suggested.

- "Just enter into it and ask the questions. Let God be God... Sometimes it comes and sometimes it doesn't," Nichols said. Sometimes it helps to mentally enter images with Jesus, she said.

- Try to leave behind preconceived notions about the text. But allow your experience to help you read between the lines.

- Once you begin a book of the Bible, read the book all the way through. Then read it again.

- "When you're reading something for the first time, ignore the footnotes. If you hit a hard part, keep going. You don't have to figure it all out at the first reading," Serenka said.

- Avoid the Chinese fortune cookie approach, seeking a one-line answer to your troubles. The most important questions are "Why did it happen?" and "What difference does it make?" according to Father Reid.

- "The point of the story about walking on the water is not that Jesus walked on the water but that Peter did," noted Father O'Malley in a July 30, 1994, article in *America*. "Any literalist attempt to argue for sandbars or massive lily pads... misses that whole point: if you forget your own shortcomings and keep your eyes solely on Jesus who sustains you, you can do what you thought was impossible."

- The Gospels aren't a biography of Jesus, Serenka said. "These words were written so you may believe," he said, paraphrasing from the Gospel of John. Also, "Keep in mind the Bible is not necessary chronological or even

logical. Sometimes things get left out."

- Be wary of books like Michael Drosnin's *The Bible Code*. In this recently published work, he asserts that the Bible contains warnings in a hidden code. But as Father O'Malley commented, "Einstein said God doesn't shoot dice. And I believe God doesn't play word games either."

- Save the Book of Revelation for later. "Don't pick that up till you are familiar with the signs, symbols and concepts of Old Testament Scriptures," Father Falcone said. And read the *New Testament Guide on Revelation*, a Liturgical Press publication.

- Attend a session of St. Bernard's on the Road, or St. Bernard's Institute. Call the diocesan Office of Continuing Education, 716/271-3657, for offerings.

- Consider the form of writing. Just as one reads a newspaper editorial, novel and scientific report with an appreciation for style, Father Reid asserted, "Similarly, we should approach each of the following in a different manner: a parable and a miracle story, a gospel and a letter, an account of the ministry of Jesus and a birth narrative in the overture to Matthew or Luke."

- Write in the margins any thoughts you might have while reading passages. "Books you do that with you don't throw away," said Halligan, who added that some students have asked at the end of a course if he wants their Bible. "They have no further use for it, they say, as if it were a text book. Little do they know."

Appointments

The following priest assignments are effective June 24.

Pastors

Father Peter Bayer, from director of pastoral care, St. Ann's of Greater Rochester, Inc., to pastor, St. Margaret Mary Parish, Irondequoit.

Father William Donnelly, from pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Elmira, to pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Rochester.

Father Andrew Grzela, from temporary administrator to pastor of St. Thomas More Parish, Brighton.

Father Dennis Sewar, from parochial vicar, St. Lawrence Parish, Greece, to pastor, St. Mary's Parish, Waterloo.

Priest Administrators

Father Bernard Carges, from pastor, Immaculate Conception Parish, Ithaca, to priest administrator, St. Anthony's Parish, Groton.

Father John Gagnier, from parochial vicar, St. Michael's Parish, Newark, to priest administrator, St. Patrick's Parish, Moravia/St. Bernard's Parish, Scipio Center.

Father George Heyman, from study leave to priest administrator, Immaculate Conception Parish, Ithaca.

Father William Moorby, to priest administrator, St. Patrick's Parish, Owego, concurrent with continuing duties as pastor, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Newark Valley.

Parochial vicars

Father P. Frederick Helfrich, from chaplain, St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester, to parochial vicar, St. Theodore's Parish, Gates.

Father Michael Volino, from priest intern, St. Theodore's Parish, Gates, to parochial vicar, St. Lawrence Parish, Greece.

Priest intern

Father Peter DeBellis, ordained May 31, 1997, to priest intern, St. Michael's Parish, Newark.

Assisting priests

Father John Quinn, from pastor, St. Margaret Mary Parish, Irondequoit, to assisting priest, St. Theodore's Parish, Gates.

Father Richard Murphy, from chaplain, Cornell University, Ithaca, to assisting priest, St. Patrick's Parish, Seneca Falls, with added duties as chaplain at New York Chiropractic College, Seneca Falls.

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