

Holy Bible



Twelfth Festival Letter of
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BISHOP OF PEORIA

Festival Letter 2014 – Calendar

In the early centuries of Catholic Christianity, when calendars were uncommon and often imprecise, a bishop would send out an annual “Festival Letter” to announce the proper dates for observing the fasts and feasts of the Liturgical Year. It was not uncommon to also use such a letter as a means of instruction for the faithful. I have established this custom in our Diocese both to foster a greater love for the liturgy and to afford myself an additional opportunity for teaching.

Dear brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has shone upon us and shall ever be manifest among us, until the day of His return. Through the rhythms of times and seasons, let us celebrate the mysteries of our salvation.

Let us recall the year’s culmination, the Sacred Easter Triduum of the Lord: His Last Supper, His Crucifixion, His Burial, and His Rising, celebrated between the evening of Thursday, the 17th of April, and the evening of Sunday, the 20th of April.

Each Easter, as on each Sunday, Holy Mother Church makes present the great and saving deed by which Christ has conquered sin and death.

From Easter are reckoned all the days we keep holy:

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, in the Year of Our Lord 2014, will occur on the 5th day of March.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. In commemoration of the Lord’s death on the cross, all Fridays of Lent are days of obligatory abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also recommended on all the Fridays of the year.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, the 15th day of April.

No other activities or pastoral responsibilities, except the need to tend to the dying, should keep a priest from attending the Chrism Mass. I also invite the faithful of our diocese to join us for this celebration as they keep their priests in prayer.

The Church will keep her most solemn night of vigil and prayer to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Saturday, the 19th of April. According the ancient

and universal practice of the Church, the Easter Vigil may not begin until after nightfall. In Central Illinois, sunset is estimated to begin at 7:42 CDT in Peoria (7:33pm CDT in Danville and 7:47 pm CDT in Moline). The Easter Vigil at the Cathedral will be celebrated at 8:15pm.

The Second Sunday of Easter is marked as Divine Mercy Sunday. I invite all of those who will have received the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion to join me in a special Mass at 10:30 am at the Cathedral. This Solemn Mass for Divine Mercy will also be our diocesan celebration for the canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II, which will have been celebrated in Rome earlier this same day.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the First of June, according to the decision of the bishops of the Illinois Province.

Pentecost, the joyful conclusion of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 8th day of June.

Any Catholic in a state of serious sin is obligated to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday. All Catholics are especially urged to confess their sins during the penitential season of Lent, during Advent, before the great festivals, and regularly throughout the year.

In a special way our Divine Savior gave the Church the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to make present the Paschal Mystery for all people of every time and place. This year, the Diocese of Peoria will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders in several ways.

On Saturday, the 17th of May at 4pm in the Cathedral, I will ordain six men to the transitional diaconate. On Saturday, May 24 at 10:30 in the morning, I rejoice to ordain four men to the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

I invite and encourage the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay-faithful to join with me at these great celebrations. All priests serving in the Diocese of Peoria are expected to participate in the Ordination of Priests. Except the need to tend to the dying, no other pastoral duty or personal obligation is of greater importance than welcoming our new brothers to our presbyterate.

Likewise, the Pilgrim Church proclaims the Passover of the Lord in the feasts of the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Saints, and in the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed.

In the Year of Our Lord 2014, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord will be celebrated on Sunday, February 2. This is also the world day of prayer for consecrated life. I invite all of the consecrated men and women who serve in our Local Church to join me in a Solemn Mass at the Cathedral, as I encourage this day to be marked with special solemnity in all of our parishes and chapels.

The Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be celebrated on Wednesday, March 19th.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord will be celebrated on Tuesday, the 25th Day of March.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on Friday, the 15th of August, and is a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church and Patroness of our diocesan vocations program, is celebrated on Wednesday, the 1st day of October, and has been raised to the rank of a liturgical feast in our Local Church.

The Solemnity of All Saints is celebrated on Saturday, the 1st day of November, and is a not Holy Day of Obligation in 2014.

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is observed on Sunday, the 2nd of November.

The feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome is celebrated on Sunday, November 9.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 30th of November, in the Year of Our Lord 2014.

In the Year of Our Lord 2014, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated on Monday, the 8th of December, and is a holy day of obligation as well as the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on Friday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Thursday, the 25th day of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Thursday, the 1st day of January in the Year of Our Lord 2015, and is a Holy Day of Obligation.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Saviour, in accord with the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* and the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, “the diocesan bishop in his own diocese may bestow the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence, using the proper formulary, three times a year on solemn feasts, which he will designate....”

As Bishop of Peoria, I am happy to bestow such blessing with the plenary indulgence during the Year of Our Lord 2014 at the end of Holy Mass for the great Solemnities of Easter Vigil, Pentecost Day, and Christmas Eve.

Further, to enhance the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical life of our parishes, I have encouraged a return to the practice of Rogation Days to mark the change of seasons. I have requested the Holy See to confirm these days as part of the official calendar of our local Church. Pending their confirmation, I encourage pastors to observe these Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

January 22 to coincide with the national day of prayer and fasting for the dignity of human life.

March 24 to highlight the beginning of the growing season, associated with the Solemnity of the Annunciation

June 23 to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist

September 13 to highlight the fruits of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross

December 7 to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

To Jesus Christ, who is, was, and who is to come, the Lord of all time and history, be endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE HOLY BIBLE

My Twelfth Festival Letter

It is important to remember that the Holy Bible is absolutely essential to the life of Christian faith. Almighty God is heard and revealed in his Word. The Bible is the articulation of the Word of God in time. The Holy Scriptures teach what we need to know about God, how we should speak about God, and how we should be guided by God. A special kind of irony is pervasive throughout the Bible, precisely because God is always being revealed as more surprising, more immense, more amazing, more good, and much more wonderful than anything man might first suspect. It could even be said that the various texts of the Bible are in conversation with one another. As one ancient author observed: "The scriptures are a mirror that reflects Divinity, now darkly, now brightly." Any extended exposure to the diversities and even the eccentricities of the scriptures is a necessary precondition for experiencing the continual newness of Divine Revelation. Within this vast collection of religious traditions, however, there is continuity, "one river through which many waters flow." The Scriptures slowly but inevitably reveal the true nature of God, despite all our human weakness and misunderstanding.

The word "Bible" is actually a plural noun, taken from the Greek words *ta biblia* or *the books*. The Bible functions more like a library of books or even a thesaurus of words about God rather than as a single book. The many books of the Bible come from many different historical periods and represent many diverse points of view. The Old Testament contains all sorts of literary genres, including canons of law, histories, prophecies, poetry, proverbs, stories, commentaries, and wise exhortations. The Old Testament, also called the Hebrew Scriptures, represents as much as nine hundred years of literary activity, but in places preserves even older religious memories and traditions. The texts of the New Testament, on the other hand, were basically produced within just a little more than that century that knew the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The entire written New Testament grew out of a shared authoritative tradition and represents an intentionally critical selection among an enormous mass of *Dominical Sayings* (words of Christ), gospels, acts, epistles, apocalypses which were widely circulating in the early Church.

It would be helpful to understand that religious writing in the ancient world was often a collaborative rather than an individual effort. For example, only a few books of the Old Testament were the product of a single author. The collective efforts of priestly, prophetic, or scribal schools often utilized the genius of several authors, sometimes living at different times in different social and historical situations. Many Biblical texts might aptly be compared to the construction of a great cathedral built through successive generations, or like a vast fresco to which several artists may have contributed. Each

sacred author is inspired by God, but it is the entire book that is finally accepted as the Word of God.

In no sense can the Christian Bible (the single collection of the Old and New Testament writings) be understood as somehow pre-existing the Christian Church. The evangelists, the early bishops, and the Church Fathers first accepted the Greek version of the Old Testament as “Sacred Scripture.” The First Century writings that became the New Testament were only later collected and authorized by the Church in a process that extended over four centuries. The basic standard for their acceptance was that these texts were in accord with apostolic preaching, were generally read during worship in those churches founded by the Apostles, and that they articulated the universal faith of the Apostolic Church. Catholic Christianity maintains that Scripture should never be understood apart from *Tradition* (authoritative oral teaching), and that *Tradition* should never be held as authoritative apart from Scripture. The 16th century notion of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) would have been incomprehensible to the teachers and bishops of antiquity that actually gave the world the Christian Bible. That *scripture alone* could constitute the sole authoritative summary of the Christian Faith is actually a theological innovation that cannot be found written down anywhere in the Bible. Historically, the Bible is the Church's book, collected by the Church and for the Church, and was canonized (held as authoritative) by that same Catholic Church. Through the eyes of faith, the Holy Bible was accepted as an extraordinary gift from God, and its inspired creation was understood to have taken place under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The final version of the Christian Bible in the late Fourth Century was also an event contemporaneous with the more general use of the book form (codex) over the use of the scroll form. In ancient times, all writing and all reading was a complex and even a somewhat clumsy process. To read a scroll, one needed both hands to unroll from the left and roll it up on the right. Since the rolls were written only on one side, they could run to great lengths. In Christian sermons, preachers liked to quote extensively from the scriptures, first from the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures and later from the Christian epistles and Gospels. Scrolls (literally *rolls*) were basically designed to be read from the beginning to the end. Marking for any reference or citation was at the very least cumbersome and often quite impossible. Since the scriptures were so diverse and could not easily be committed entirely to memory, the use of scrolls within Christian worship became something of a problem. The book form, on the other hand, had pages written on both sides, that could more easily be turned, allowing a preacher to consult texts individually and in random order. To a significant degree it was the exigencies of preaching that slowly gave rise to the basic format of the book that is still in use today. In a certain sense, not only did the Catholic Church first authorize the accepted canon of sacred scripture, it also helped to create even that material object that is now called *the Bible*.

Inspiration

The revelation of God in the Bible is a twofold event: the Word of God in the words of men. The literal meaning may have been intended by man, but the ultimate spiritual meaning was intended by God. Divine authority is not in competition with human agency in the production of the scriptures. When describing the books of the Bible as being inspired, what is usually meant is that although they were clearly written by human beings, they are unlike all other human literature because in a privileged and a wondrous way, God was directly involved in their production. The Bible gives a human vocabulary to Divine Revelation that in a certain sense prefigures the mystery of the Incarnation when: *the Word became flesh*. For believers, the entire Bible is divinely inspired and persistently valid for instruction in faith. What is finally revealed in the scriptures is exactly what God wishes to teach as the truth.

Some modern commentators focus almost entirely upon proposed reconstructions of what they discern to be pre-existent traditions. While such studies may enhance our knowledge, this emphasis in isolation from the final text can actually distort its full meaning. Just as with our appreciation of William Shakespeare, to reduce our understanding merely to a study of his literary sources would immeasurably diminish the sheer genius of his collected works. With the books of the Bible, Divine inspiration was operative both in producing individual verses as well as in the process of collecting and editing the collections of material that eventually became the final texts. The truth of the scriptures is derived from the intention of God and the discernment of the believing community that received its various texts as “Sacred Scripture.”

The Bible often uses “types,” (symbolic signs or examples) that are rather like riddles to be solved. Sometimes the meaning only becomes clear after what has been foretold in the “type” comes to pass. Particular texts were also reinterpreted and expanded in indifferent times, for different needs, and in different circumstances. For instance, the famous prophecy of Isaiah that *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son* (Isaiah 7:14) was first given to King Ahaz as a sign of Divine protection against an impending military threat. This passage came to promise something much more for the Jews when they were exiled to Babylon. It was only after the Exile and the return to the Promised Land that an entire collection of texts finally became what we now call the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. By the time of the Second Temple, the ancient prophecy about a promised child was especially charged with messianic hope for a descendent of David who would bring salvation to Israel. There was also intense eschatological (*end time*) expectation of an eternal Kingdom of peace where even the elements of nature would be reconciled.

While the Bible is inerrant in teaching about God, the various books may not necessarily be accurate regarding pre-scientific perceptions of cosmology, biology, traditional chronologies, or specific historical details. That God created the heavens with all the stars and lights is Divine Revelation. Describing the heavens as a material vault or a physical dome (cf Genesis 1:17), however, is simply using the language and scientific understanding of a past moment in time in order to express an eternal truth. In other instances, so unconcerned is the Bible with the certain details, that it sometimes presents two or more versions of the same event, told by two or more people, sometimes from different eras and with different perspectives. It is a rabbinic dictum that: “There is neither early nor late in the Torah.” Chronology may be violated in order to reveal an important message or to teach a necessary truth. The Bible typically uses numbers as symbolic approximations rather than as arithmetically precise measures. Another ancient rabbi once noted that the Bible “has seventy faces.” From the Biblical perspective, what is important is what God intends those “faces” to mean in the final collection of the sacred texts. For example in the New Testament, whether or not historians are ever able to figure out the precise sequence of the events of Holy Week is of little importance. What is essential are the intended meanings of the four different chronological arrangements in the actual texts of the four Gospels.

Interpretation

One single text can never stand apart from all the other texts of the Bible. The whole interprets the part, rather than a part interpreting the whole. The Bible finds its context within the living tradition of the Church and in harmony with its authoritative confessions of faith. The whole point of the Bible is to function as “Sacred Scripture,” a fact which can be distorted or even entirely missed by some scholars. Believers learn *from* the Bible, while scholars grounded only in the modern critical approach are reduced to only learning *about* the Bible. It is the believing Church that is inspired by God to read and correctly understand the Holy Scriptures. As Saint Paul once wrote to Timothy: *The Church of the living God, upholds the truth and keeps it safe.* (1st Timothy 3:15) As the Council of Chalcedon was also to affirm regarding the interpretive correlation of Scripture and Tradition: “following the saintly fathers” and “teaching just as the prophets taught from the beginning, as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the Creed of the Fathers handed it down to us.”

For Christians, both Testaments essentially speak of Christ who is the very Incarnation of the Word of God. It is in the light of the Old Testament that the New Testament understands the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but the New also invites a re-reading of the Old in the light of Christ. As an ancient Christian author put it: “All the divine scripture is one book, and that one book is Christ, because all of divine scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine scripture is fulfilled in Christ.” Large portions

of the New Testament are rather like extended reflections on the inspired words of the Old Testament. It was faith in Jesus that guided this massive rereading. Both Testaments were received by the Church as gifts of Divine Revelation that could never be adequately understood apart from one another. Christianity insists that the entire Bible be heard with reverence, with faith, and with an open heart.

From the earliest days of the Church, Christian teachers have pursued learned interpretive studies based on their detailed knowledge of the Old Testament, not only in its Greek version but often as well in its Hebrew version. In continuity with the rabbis of that time and most certainly with the authors of the New Testament, the Church Fathers sought to discover the symbolic meaning of many of the passages of the First Testament. As one ancient authority stated: “Paul provides a rule of interpretation. Take note how much Paul’s teaching differs from the plain meaning. What the Jews thought was the crossing of the sea, Paul calls baptism. What the people supposed was a cloud, Paul says was the Holy Spirit. And what Exodus calls a rock, Paul says was Christ.” As Saint Paul himself explained: *Now all these things that happened to them were symbolic.* (1st Corinthians 10:11) According to the Apostle, the ancient events were dramatic rehearsals for the deeds of Christ, who perfectly fulfilled all the promises of God. For example, as he wrote to the Church of Galatia: *It is written that Abraham had two sons, one by slave and one by a free woman. But the son of a slave was born of the flesh. The son of a free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory; these women are two covenants.* (Galatians 4:23)

In a general sense, the Church Fathers recognized types, symbols, and allegories throughout the Old Testament. They searched for God’s richer meaning given in the original that could only be fully understood when, *now in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son* (Hebrews 1:2). They understood the “spiritual sense” not as the negation of the “literal sense” but rather the perception of an ultimate meaning only fully revealed in Christ. Saint John Cassian offered a fourfold definition of this long accepted method of Christian interpretation:

The letter teaches us what happened.
The allegory shows us what to believe.
The moral teaches us what to do.
The anagogical speaks about what is to come.

He used as an example the City of Jerusalem:

The literal sense means the Jewish Holy City.
The allegorical sense signifies the Church.
The moral sense indicates the realm of the soul.

The anagogical sense (the world to come) points to the Heavenly City.

The Historical Jesus and the Historical Bible

The Epistles of Saint Paul are the very first complete canonical texts of the New Testament. In Paul there is no full narrative about Jesus, even though Paul makes many references to Jesus' life. Paul frequently refers to the Lord's teaching and then applies this message to the concerns and situations of the particular communities being addressed. It is clear that when he does so, he assumes a shared common knowledge of the basic Jesus story. Paul takes for granted that there is a connection between living memories of Jesus and the expectations they propose for Christian discipleship. It is particularly striking, that in his Letter to the Romans, Paul uses the received tradition about the Lordship of Jesus as the basis for an instruction to a church that he had not founded or had not yet even visited. His teaching about Christ, years before the composition of the Gospels, clearly demonstrates that the "real Jesus" was already well known among the first Christians and not some later invention. As Benedict XVI has also pointed out, certain phrases such as *Maranatha (Come Our Lord)* preserved in the original Aramaic or confessions of faith in Greek verses from early Christian hymns pre-existed the New Testament texts in which they are contained. They obviously testify to Christianity's foundational faith in Jesus as *Lord* (meaning: *Kyrios, Adonai, God*). From the very beginning, Jesus was confessed as the Incarnate Son of God, which is really the only plausible explanation for the explosion of evangelical zeal that burst out from the original churches of Palestine and into the whole world. Men and women were willing to give up everything, even their very lives, not for some obscure and misguided rabbi, but because of their unshakable faith in the glorious Risen Christ.

What Paul presents as normative in Christianity's faith would later be found in all four Gospels. Paul always claimed to teach about Jesus in accord with the other Apostles (Palestinian witnesses to the resurrection), even including those who were in some ways his rivals and with whom he sometimes disagreed about the interpretation of the Jewish Law. The Apostle to the Gentiles obviously assumes that an underlying narrative about the life of Christ was the common possession of the early Christian communities throughout the Roman world. This same foundational story of Jesus is also presupposed in the Letter to the Hebrews, in the Letters of Peter, James, and Jude, and in the Book of Revelation.

In fact, throughout the diverse literature of the New Testament, Jesus appears as a definite, indeed an unmistakably specific person, who by his life, death, and resurrection reveals God's great love and generous mercy. There is striking coherence and consistency in the descriptions of Jesus, his way of life, and his teaching. It is once again becoming more widely appreciated that the Gospel traditions were connected with

sometimes named and often well-known eyewitnesses. These were people who had known the Lord, heard his message from his own lips, and committed it to memory. These men and women had personally witnessed the dramatic events of his life. They remained throughout their own lifetimes the sources and the guarantors of the stories they continued to tell. The four evangelists who collected these oral traditions were in fact much closer to their material than were most of the historians, upon whose authority rests much of today's received knowledge of the other personalities and events of the Roman world. It could quite accurately be asserted that we have significantly more textural evidence about Jesus than about any other single individual who lived in the First Century.

In fact, the *One Gospel of Christ* was recorded four times, by four different writers. Each Gospel teaches in its own fashion, but no single Gospel captures all the truth. Rather than dividing or diminishing the *Good News*, this plurality constitutes a conspicuous plenitude. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are usually identified as the Synoptic Gospels (synoptic from a Greek word meaning *together*), because they share *together* a body of material held in common from an oral or a literary source. Each Gospel, however, also has significant material unique to itself. Matthew proselytes his fellow Jews, Mark relates Peter's version of events, Luke gathers facts for Gentile converts. The Fourth Gospel is sometimes called the *Maverick Gospel* because its distinctive narrative is often independent of the Synoptic tradition. John responds, along with many other concerns, to those who denied the Incarnation. It is striking, nonetheless, how strong, consistent, and identifiable is the basic personality of Jesus presented in all four Gospels. There is an unmistakable unity of conviction concerning the Lord throughout the entire New Testament. This shared description is replicated by the Apostolic Fathers, in other early Christian writings, and in the most ancient Christian Creeds.

In the late Nineteenth Century and in the Twentieth Century many scholars brought to their study of the Bible what Benedict XVI has called the "hermeneutic of doubt" or a way of explaining the scriptures exclusively through the lens of profound disbelief. This "critical" study of the Bible was largely based upon the earlier convictions of the Eighteenth Century *Enlightenment* that basically rejected any possibility of the miraculous and sometimes even any possibility of God. These teachers simply assert, often with their own kind of noncritical *faith*, that truth can only be determined within their rather narrow grasp of scientific or mathematical principles. They tend to be unswervingly dogmatic about their methodology and usually dismiss all other interpreters of the Bible except for other critical scholars. They owe a significant intellectual debt to the late Nineteenth Century academic tradition, as it had been passed on at various schools by several generations of a nonbelieving professorate. Many of these so called "critical scholars," simply posit, for example, a "zealot Jesus" (this version has just recently been rehashed from the late 1960's by a Muslim author and then

predictably lionized by elements of the media), a “political revolutionary Jesus,” a “cynical wisdom teacher Jesus,” a “confused or misguided Jesus,” a “Jesus who never actually existed,” or a “radical feminist Jesus.” These works often reveal more about their authors than about anything that could be demonstratively based either upon biblical or extra-biblical texts. As a great Jewish scholar once observed: “The studious imaginations of scholars have endlessly sought to discover the *historical Jesus* and have only come up with those fabricated historical figures which are too many and diverse for an argument.”

The modern media also sensationalizes what are inaccurately described as newly discovered texts about Jesus, but texts that quite accurately could be described as “long banned from the Bible.” It is sometimes proposed that these “scriptures” will dramatically transform our knowledge of Jesus and the traditional version of Christianity. In fact, these so called *gospels* were all written a century or more after the four canonical Gospels, upon which they demonstrate a clear literary dependence. They are usually gnostic in conviction, which means they were intended only for a small elite. They rejected the moral authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, and they do radically reinterpret the life and message of Christ. They generally denigrate God as revealed in the Old Testament, the material creation, the institution of marriage, woman in general (because they enslave men in the flesh), and certainly human procreation. Gnosticism (an inner knowledge) was very popular in some ancient philosophical and religious circles which sought a kind of spiritual escape from the confines of the material universe. Saint Irenaeus writing in the Second Century describes “Christian Gnostics” in the following way: “Every one of them, just as suits his own temperament, modifies the traditions he has received.” Some modern scholars hoping to deconstruct the doctrinal authority of the Bible in support of current enthusiasms, are certainly being intellectually disingenuous when they invoke the gnostic scriptures. For example, the so called “Gospel of Mary” which in recent years has sparked all sorts of nonsense about Mary Magdalene actually concludes with the Lord transforming Mary into a man, which could hardly justify the tenets of modern radical feminism.

Knowing the Real Jesus by Reading the Real Bible

Saint Hilary of Poitiers in the Fourth Century articulated the Church’s traditional understanding of how the Bible should be preached and believed: “Every part of Holy Scripture announces through words the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, reveals it through facts, and establishes it through examples. For it is our Lord who during all the present age, through true and manifest foreshadowing, generates, cleanses, sanctifies, chooses, separates, or redeems the Church in the Patriarchs, through Adam’s slumber, Noah’s flood, Isaac’s birth, and Jacob’s bondage.”

Thomas Merton writing in the Twentieth Century rhapsodizes about this perennial savor for Christ throughout the entire Bible in this way: “Every word that comes from the mouth of God is nourishment that feeds the soul with eternal life. Whether Scripture tells of David hiding from Saul in the mountains, and Saul’s men surrounding his hiding place like a crown, or whether it tells about Jesus raising up the son of the widow of Naim, or the prescriptions for the evening sacrifice of incense, or sings the hymn of Deborah, or tells us that Heli, the priest of Silo thought Anna was drunk when she prayed to have a son; whether it tells us in the *Canticle* that the Spouse has gone down to see if the vineyards are in flower, or shows us the new Jerusalem coming down from God adorned as a bride, or rebukes the incestuous Corinthians, or leads Paul to the river in Macedonia where women gather and the Holy Spirit opened the heart of Lydia, the seller of dye, to hear the gospel everywhere there are doors and windows opened into the same eternity - and the most powerful communication of Scripture is the engrafted word, the secret and inexpressible seed of contemplation planted in the depths of the soul and awakening it with an immediate and inexpressible contact with the Living Word, that we may adore Him in Spirit and in Truth.”

The Second Vatican Council much more succinctly taught the same conviction about the absolute centrality of Christ throughout the many and diverse texts of the entire Bible: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

How the Bible should be Loved and Believed

For the Church, the Bible is not the repository of a dead past but rather the communication of a living reality. When the scriptures are proclaimed during the Sacred Liturgy, read for catechetical instruction, or studied for personal devotion, it is God Himself who is speaking. The Word of God is pronounced through God’s own voice to God’s own people. There is a kind of *remembering* or what Catholic theology calls *anamnesis*, when what is being announced is made present through the power of the Holy Spirit. In a prayerful study of the Holy Bible we can know the creation of everything out of nothing, paradise and the fall, the instructive stories of the patriarchs, the exodus of God’s people, the giving of the Law, the conquest of the Land, the histories of the judges and kings, the poetry of the psalms, the inspiration of the prophets, and the wisdom of the sages. In the Bible we meet Jesus Christ, we experience his miracles, listen to his parables, and follow him from the cross, to the grave, to the glory of the resurrection and ascension. In the Holy Scriptures we are present at Pentecost and hear the teaching of the Apostles. We catch sight of the Second Coming. We know the awe of the Last Judgment and the consummation of all things. We anticipate the endless splendor and ceaseless bliss of heaven.

So knowledge of the Bible is essential for our knowledge of the mysteries of God. As Saint Paul once wrote to Timothy: *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.* (2nd Timothy 3:16-17) Or as Saint Jerome once strongly insisted: “Often read the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, let the Bible never be out of your hands. Get a firm grasp of the truths of faith according to doctrine, in order to exhort men in sacred doctrine and refute those who oppose the faith.” As the Church continues to emphasize the necessity of Faith in a culture of unbelief and as recent Popes have called for a New Evangelization, may the Word of God always be in our hearts and on our lips as we proclaim the *Good News* to everyone we meet.

If you are just beginning to study the Bible, I have a few practical suggestions. Every syllable of the Scriptures is necessary and valuable, but I would not begin by reading the more detailed passages of the Book of Numbers, the more obscure passages of the Prophecy of Ezekiel, or the more terrifying sections of the Book of Revelation. I would start by a reflective reading of one of the Gospels or one of the Epistles. Set aside a quiet moment every day and try to read a paragraph or even just a few sentences. As Saint Bernard of Clairvaux once said: “The Bible is the wine cellar of the Holy Spirit.” *So Taste and see the great goodness of the Lord.* (Psalm 34: 8) Savor God’s Word. Be challenged and renewed in God’s Word. Rest in God’s Word. Let the Holy Spirit illuminate your mind and enkindle your heart as you read God’s Word. God is such good company. When God speaks to you, pause, listen, enjoy, and be renewed. Be patient. The more you read, the more you will understand. As you get to know the New Testament, you will find richer meaning in the Old Testament. Try to read ahead the scriptures appointed for Sunday Mass, and then really listen when they are proclaimed and explained. There are all sorts of commentaries, the Catechism, resources on the Internet, study groups, and prayer groups all there to help you.

A particular book of the Bible that every believer should try to get to know would certainly be the Psalter. Christians have long described the Book of Psalms as the *Songs of the Spirit*, meaning the hymns that God Himself has given us for intercession, reflection, worship, praise, and thanks. In a certain sense the psalms offer a summary of the entire deposit of faith revealed in the Scriptures, and in another sense, only the entire Bible would serve as an adequate commentary on the psalms. In the New Testament there are more quotations from the psalms (at least 140) than from any other book of the Old Testament. The psalms are certainly prayers but they are also something more. A personal conversation goes on between the psalmist and the psalm, the psalmist and God, and the psalmist and the community of believers. People more often speak to God in the psalms rather than God speaking to them. As one commentator has noted, the God encountered in the Psalter is “restrained in speaking but passionate in listening.”

Certainly the words of the psalms are not always polite and sometimes even express emotions near the raw nerves of human experience. From the cross, Jesus himself cried out in agony: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Psalm 22:1) Expressing the widest possible range of emotion, the Book of Psalms offers humble worship, exultant praise and thanks, terrible guilt, deadly fear, desperate cries for help, rage against injustice, and profound expressions of faith. For believers guided by the Spirit, the Psalter is a treasure chest of truth, a mine of wisdom, and an ocean of religious experience.

Traditionally, the words of the psalms should be understood as the prayers of Jesus, pointing to him and prayed in his name. The psalms are also the prayers of the Church, prayed by the Church, for the Church, and for the whole world. Finally, the psalms are prayed by individuals, expressing an enormous range of religious feeling. Priests, deacons, religious, and some lay people sanctify their day by praying the Liturgy of the Hours, which over the course of four weeks includes the entire collection of the 150 psalms. Saint Augustine describes his own experience of praying the psalms: “How I cried to you in those psalms, and how they kindled my love for you.” Thomas Merton also recognized the great blessing of this form of worship: “This is the secret of the psalms. Our identity is hidden in them. In them we find ourselves and God. In these fragments, He has revealed not only Himself to us and ourselves to Him.”

Studying the Epistles of Saint Paul is another essential means of getting to know the *Word of God*. While his writing encompasses enormous theological depth and variety, as one scholar has noted, reading Paul can sometimes be a bit like “reading someone else’s mail.” What is found is usually not a fully developed message as he would have certainly delivered during his “on site” preaching. Instead, his letters basically served as a kind of substitute for his presence. They often give “follow up” advice regarding particular problems that had been brought to his attention either by oral report or by letter. Paul’s impetuous personality apparently led him at times to express himself in overstatement or in ambiguous preaching. His follow up responses by letter often evidenced surprise that he had not been correctly understood. For example, we read in 1st Corinthians 7:1, *Now concerning the things about which you wrote*. Besides giving instruction, however, Paul would also share news, worries, disappointments, consolations, joy, and sometimes even anger.

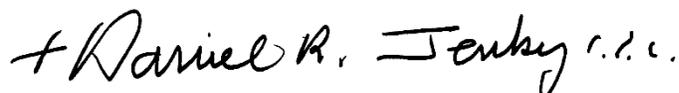
It should also be noted that, as was the practice in those days, all of Paul’s letters were dictated, sometimes simultaneously to more than one scribe. He would have used a variety of secretaries or even co-authors in the course of his many years of evangelizing. This insight into his method of communicating as well as a more enhanced understanding of the literary presuppositions of his own day basically overturns decades of early modern debate regarding authenticity based solely upon a proposed discovery of an exclusive Pauline style and vocabulary. Today, it can be much more confidently held

that the entire *Pauline corpus* was at the very least personally “authorized” by the Holy Apostle himself.

Paul clearly wanted his epistles to be read aloud and then be shared with other churches. A common characteristic of his letters is that after the address and introduction, a thanksgiving usually follows (with the exception of his rather blunt and angry Epistle to the Galatians), which subtly introduces the main themes of the letter. After he dealt with important doctrinal points, he usually turned to exhortation and then ended with blessing. Paul is always exciting to read, if not always easy to understand. As one contemporary theologian has observed: “If you know a genius, you know Paul. Quick, deeply perceptive, highly intelligent, impatient or unaware that others could not always keep up with him.” It was, however, Paul’s deeply moving interpretation of the Lord’s life, death, and resurrection that has offered the inspiration for personal conversion for generation after generation of Christian believers.

Sadly, it may be true that more Christians own a Bible than actually read a Bible. As your bishop, I strongly urge you to do both. In an increasingly pagan culture that disparages all religious practice but perhaps reserves its greatest hatred for God’s Holy Catholic Church, believers, more than ever before, will need the Word of God to guide their lives, encourage their service, and inspire their prayer. The phrase *Be not afraid*, so beloved by John Paul II, appears more than 350 times throughout the Bible. So for the sake of your family, your parish, your community, your Church, and yourself, I hope you will read the Bible and then *not be afraid*. As I have also encouraged in the past, pray the Rosary if you want to more deeply savor the immense spiritual riches of the Scriptures. Almost every word of the Rosary is taken from the Bible, and the Mysteries of the Rosary are based upon the Bible. The Rosary makes a kind of contemplative space for the Divine Word to enter more fully into your own words. Since it was the faith of Mary that first brought the Word of God to birth in this world, ask Our Lady to pray with you and for you, so that the Holy Scriptures may always be on your lips, in your heart, and engrafted onto your very soul.

Epiphany Sunday
Ad 2014



✠Most Reverend Daniel Robert Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Appendix-

MOST REV. DANIEL R. JENKY, C.S.C.
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF PEORIA



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To the Clergy, Religious and Faithful for the Diocese of Peoria:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As part of the renewal of the Liturgical Calendar envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, the Church calls for special days to be set aside “to offer prayers to the Lord for the needs of all people, especially for the productivity of the earth and for human labor, and to give him public thanks” (General Norms for the Liturgical Year, 45).

After consultation with several pastors, and with the advice of the Council of Farmers, I am very happy to recommend the celebration of Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria. These five days are richly connected to the agricultural roots of our local Church and highlight important aspects of our Faith.

Effective the First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2013, the following days could be observed as Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

- January 22, 2014 to coincide with the national day of prayer for the dignity of life
- March 24, 2014 to highlight the new beginning of the growing season, associated with the Solemnity of the Annunciation
- June 23, 2014 to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist
- September 13, 2014 to highlight the fruitfulness of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross
- December 7, 2014 to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

I will also petition the Holy See to include these celebrations in the official Calendar of the Diocese of Peoria. Pending the approbation of the Congregation for Divine Worship, the observance of these Rogation Days are encouraged in our diocese.

I have asked Fr. Luke Spannagel, my Vicar for Rural Life, to prepare a more detailed instruction to be published in the Catholic Post which will include suggestions on how to mark these Rogation days in our parishes and our homes.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.".

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA