

The God Who Speaks

Introduction

“The Word of God is the light that guides our journey, nourishes our faith, and regenerates it. It is the Word of God that continually renews our hearts and our communities. Therefore, let us not forget to read it and meditate upon it every day, so that it may become for each like a flame that we bear inside us to illuminate our steps as well as the steps of others who journey beside us, who are perhaps struggling to find the path to Christ. Always with the Word of God! The Word of God carried in your hand: a little Gospel in your pocket, purse, always to be read. Do not forget this: always with me, the Word of God!”

(Pope Francis, Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, Rome, 6 January 2015)

This series of twelve encounters with the Word of God are for you to use in whatever way is best for you and for your community. They are set out in a process which lends itself to a month-by-month approach, but your own needs - or your interests - may encourage you to choose to focus these sessions in an alternative way: perhaps in response to the changing seasons of the Church’s year (or even the school or academic year!). Or you might decide, simply, to run the sessions weekly or fortnightly because that is best for you. This really is your choice.

It is your choice, also, how you decide to approach the sessions and the duration of each. You might think of them as a *Bible Study group*, or you might prefer the idea of a *prayer group with reflective readings*. You might like to add suitable hymns - or a cup of tea at the end! The mood of the sessions - whether active discussion or contemplative encounter - is up to you: I call them ‘encounters’ because I hope that you will ‘hear’ God’s word in a way that is somehow surprising to you; and I hope that you will recognise that God’s word is spoken to us in many ways: yes, through Scripture, but also in personal prayer, and also in our exchanges with one another as the People of Faith who carry the understanding of God’s meaning (the *sensus fidei*) with us and among us.

There are no ‘rules’ about how you should approach God’s Word - except, I would suggest, that *reverence* is, in some way, necessary. How you hold onto that reverence, and how you share it with one another, is for you to discover yourselves.

And - please - do not forget the people who cannot be with you, either because of work or other commitments, or because of illness, disability or the frailty which may well come with age: these people are members of our Catholic community too. Try to find - I encourage you - some way to include these many, and certainly to remember them when you gather together.

If you are one of the many who find yourself alone, then please remember that others are remembering you and are praying for you. And you can use these encounters yourself, in your prayer and in your own time of reflection: again, use them in whatever way works best for you.

God’s Word is *given* to us: let us share it with open hearts.

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A Note on References in the text

Scriptural references - if you would like to read them for yourself - always follow this format:

Book (of Bible) Chapter Verse(s)

So Genesis 1:1-2 is the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1, Verses 1 to 2, and Mark 10:13-16 is the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 10, Verses 13 to 16.

It's useful for have a Bible of your own, so that you can re-read the texts, and perhaps reflect on them in prayer. The readings at Mass are usually taken from the Jerusalem Bible (which was revised and is now known as the *New Jerusalem Bible*). The Psalms at Mass are a translation (the Grail version) which, although based on the Psalms in the Jerusalem Bible, were revised so that they could be said or sung in the liturgy of the church.

References to papal documents always follow this format:

Author Title Chapter or Section number Date

So Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 112-117, 25 March 2019 is where the Holy Father speaks to young people about God's love for them.

Although it may seem daunting to be reading papal documents, I hope that you will discover how Pope Francis especially speaks in straightforward, practical and powerful ways in more than just 'sound-bites'. His writings are a deeply valuable help and guide to ordinary Christians, and a good source for reflection in prayer.

The Bible

Because the Bible was originally written in a number of different languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic), the text always comes to us in translation. There are many different translations, and it can be interesting to compare how they approach each particular text.

I have used two different translations here: the Jerusalem Bible (JB), and the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition (NRSVACE) are both approved for use at Mass, but you can find many others of interest (for example, the Good News Bible). Sometimes people worry whether their Bible is the 'Catholic Edition', but this shouldn't put you off reading whatever version you have: 'Catholic Edition' means that the version includes *all* of the books of the Bible that are accepted by the Catholic Church, including some books whose authenticity is disputed by some other Christian communities.