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Spiritual

Welcoming God's Word

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

The foundation of all catechesis and faith formation is the word of God, especially as it finds expression in the Bible. Those engaged in catechetical ministry have a unique responsibility to communicate the centrality of the Scriptures in the life of Christ's disciples. To fulfill this responsibility, however, they must first welcome God's word in their own hearts. But what does this mean? We can begin to understand what it means to welcome God's word by understanding the kind of word that God speaks to us.

At first it seems that God's word, as so many other words in our lives, has to do with communicating a message. In fact, that is true. God's word in the Bible does communicate what God wants us to know. There is, however, an even more significant dimension to God's word. It not only communicates, it also effects change. It brings about transformation. Listen to Isaiah who speaks in God's name:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making

it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10-11.

The word of God traverses a holy path from the heart of God to the hearts of believers.

Cardinal Martini, the emeritus archbishop of Milan and a foremost scholar of the Bible, carefully delineated that path that the word of God takes. It begins, he notes, in the heart of God. This is evident in the passage from Isaiah. God speaks of "... my word ... that goes out from my mouth." From the mysterious depths of God a word emerges. It is mediated and spoken by prophets and sages. Finally, "... in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son ..." (Hebrews 1:2) Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the

Reflection

community preserves and treasures the memory of God's word. Inspired by that same Holy Spirit, it sets that word into a written text of Sacred Scripture. The text is proclaimed, preached, taught, and explained in the Church. Believers hear and receive that word. First, they hear. Then they understand with their minds. Finally, they welcome it into their hearts where it brings about transformation.

The word of God traverses this holy path from the heart of God to the heart of believers. Every generation must claim this movement and recognize it with deep reverence and gratitude. When this happens, the word takes flesh within us. And this is Paul's meaning when he reminisces with the Thessalonians about the way that they received God's word. May it also be said of us:

... when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

For Reflection

- How much time do you currently spend in reading Sacred Scripture and reflecting on it?
- What words of Sacred Scripture have touched your heart most deeply?

Louis J. Cameli is a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and pastor of Divine Savior Parish in Norridge, Illinois. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome and obtained a doctorate in theology with a specialization in spirituality. He is the former director of ongoing formation of priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago and director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House, Mundelein, Illinois. In February, 2002, he received the Pope John XXIII Award from the National Organization for the Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERC) for his contributions to the continuing education and ongoing formation of priests. He has authored numerous books on spirituality and also served as a writer and theological consultant for RCL's *Faith First* and *Faith First Legacy Edition* K-8 curriculum.

Thanksgiving and Praise

A Psalm of David

*I give you thanks, O LORD,
with my whole heart;
before the gods I **sing your praise**;
I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name
for your **steadfast love** and your **faithfulness**;
for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.*

*On the day I called, **you answered me**,
you increased my strength of soul.*

*All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard **the words of your mouth**.*

*They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the **glory of the LORD**.*

*For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.*

*Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.*

*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake **the work of your hands**.*

PSALM 138

Overview: The Scriptures

The Scriptures explores the central themes and message of the Bible. It explains what the Bible is and why it is considered the holy book of the Christian community. It introduces some of the foundational stories of the Bible. The module concludes with a reflection on Jesus Christ, who reveals to us the fullness of God's saving action. It also describes the activity of the disciples as they began to spread Jesus' message beyond Palestine after his Resurrection.

You will engage in a process of faith reflection using three components: a DVD, this companion booklet, and a CD-ROM. See page 5 for an explanation of how these components complement one another. You began the process on pages 6 and 7 with a reflection on God's word. On the next two pages you will engage in an opening activity that will allow you to explore the role the Bible has played in your life so far.

Each of the four segments in this module is divided into two parts. Here is an overview of the topics:

1. What Is the Bible?

Part 1: The Word of God

Part 2: The Formation of the Scriptures

2. Why Is the Bible Holy?

Part 1: Canon and Context

Part 2: Biblical Inspiration

3. What's in the Bible?

Part 1: Exodus and Exile

Part 2: The Story of God's People

4. Jesus & The Alpha and the Omega

Part 1: Fulfillment of God's Promise

Part 2: Proclaiming the Good News

You will find a six-page booklet process for each segment to help you reflect on the DVD content and choose ways to apply what you have learned to your life. Here is the structure you will find:

- 1. Introduction:** The goal and objectives for each session, plus an opening reflection question
- 2. Looking Ahead—Presentation:** A video overview and a space to write questions and comments
- 3. Looking Back—Reflection:** Three questions to check comprehension and provide an opportunity for dialogue
- 4. Looking Beyond—Application:** An opportunity to reflect on Scripture passages and relate them to life

As you work with this module you will need your own Bible close at hand. If you need to purchase a Bible, you will find advice on page 47 to guide you. If you are not accustomed to looking up passages in the Bible, the guide on page 46 will assist you.

This module is only a brief introduction to the great themes of Sacred Scripture. As you continue to read, study, reflect, and attend classes and workshops, you will grow in knowledge and insight. Both adult and catechist formation requires the mutual support of other learners. Try to participate in the learning process of this module in a group setting. If circumstances require that you work independently, find at least one other person with whom you can share your reflections.

Margaret Nutting Ralph, PhD, worked for the Covington and Lexington Dioceses for thirty years, as a classroom teacher, adult education consultant, Director of RCIA and Evangelization, and finally as Secretary of Educational Ministries for sixteen years. Presently she is the director of the MAPS (Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies) program for Catholics at Lexington Theological Seminary. Dr. Ralph is the author of ten books on Scripture, including Paulist Press' bestseller, *And God Said What?* and the recently published *Breaking Open the Lectionary: Lectionary Readings in their Biblical Context for RCIA, Faith Sharing Groups, and Lectors*. Her work has been translated into Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Korean.

Why Is the Bible Holy?

Have you ever had difficulty determining the right thing to do? We Christians define the right thing to do as what God would have us do. That is why we pray to know and do God's will. But how are we to know God's will? One important way is through the Bible. The Bible is holy because it teaches us the truth about God. We believe that through the process of divine inspiration the biblical writers communicated truthfully all that God wished to convey for the sake of salvation. Over time, the leaders of the Church collected those texts which accurately represented the faith of the community and established the canon of Sacred Scripture.

Goal

To understand that the Bible is holy because it reveals the truth about God

Learning Objectives

- To explain what the Church means by the canon of Sacred Scripture
- To understand more fully the importance of context in discovering the truth of the Bible
- To describe what we mean when we say that the Bible is inspired

Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions. Then discuss them with another person or with your group.

Do you have a family Bible? If so, where is it located in your home? In what ways do you show that you consider the Bible a sacred book?

Prayer

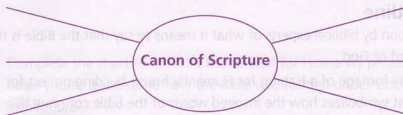
Lord, your word, given to us in the Scriptures, is life and light to us. It nourishes us, strengthens us, and instructs us in your ways. Thank you for the gift of faith and bless us with a love of the holy writings that lead us to you. We ask this in the name of your Word, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Looking Back

Part 1: Canon and Context

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with a group.

1. What are some words or phrases that help explain what we mean by the canon of Sacred Scripture? Create a word map by placing your responses on the diagram below.



2. When considering the context of a Scripture passage, remember that the formation of the Scriptures was a 2,000-year process. Compare and contrast some things you know about biblical times with today's world. Why is it important to understand these similarities and differences?

Biblical Times

Today

3. If you were speaking today like a biblical prophet, what critique would you make about aspects of today's culture that are consistent with your understanding of the word of God?

Remember . . .

The writing and gathering of the books of the Bible occurred over many centuries.

The canon of Sacred Scripture is the collection of books considered normative by the Church.

Scripture passages must be interpreted in context.

piration of Sacred Scripture and a
ed in the Psalms. Below you will find an
DVD that accompanies this part. You may
ch the DVD. Below the outline, there is
at occur to you during and after the

- what it means to say that the Bible is the
for Humanity house-building project for
inspired words of the Bible continue to
as rooted in a people's deep faith in God

feelings, or ideas that occur to you

what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God for Humanity house-building project for inspired words of the Bible continue to be as rooted in a people's deep faith in God as the words of the Bible themselves. The Bible is a living document, and its words are not to be taken literally, but as a guide to living. The Bible is a book of faith, and its words are to be taken as a guide to living. The Bible is a book of faith, and its words are to be taken as a guide to living. The Bible is a book of faith, and its words are to be taken as a guide to living.

Looking Back

Part 2: Biblical Inspiration

Reflect silently on one or more of the questions below and then jot down your response(s). Then share your thoughts with another person or with a group.

1. What new insight do you have about the nature of biblical inspiration as a result of viewing this video?
2. Complete the chart to tell how the Habitat for Humanity project helps you to understand how the Bible was formed under God's inspiration.

The Bible

- Inspired by God's vision
- Responds to a human need
- Communicates how to live God's vision

Habitat for Humanity

3. What do you communicate by the way you use Sacred Scripture in prayer, your classroom, and in your home?

Remember . . .

God reveals God's self to us through our human experience.

Inspiration means that through the biblical writers God disclosed what we need to know for our salvation.

The Psalms express the faith of a people in God's presence with them.

We reverence Christ's presence in both the Scriptures and in the Eucharist.

Looking Beyond

In this segment you learned more about how the Bible came to be the holy book of God's people. The next exercise will allow you to explore a way that both you and God's people express your faith in God.

**If the Scriptures
are not to
become a dead
letter, Christ,
the eternal
Word of the
living God,
must, through
the Holy Spirit,
"open [our]
minds to
understand
the Scriptures."**

CCC 108
Cf. Luke 24:45



**FOR PARENTS
AND CATECHISTS**

Encourage children to memorize well-known verses from the Psalms, especially those that are part of the Sunday lectionary.

REFLECT ON GOD'S WORD

The Psalms express the faith of God's people. Read the following Psalms prayerfully. Describe how each describes an aspect of your own faith in God.

Psalm 23 (The Lord, Shepherd and Host)

Psalms 42–43 (Longing for God's Presence)

Psalm 139 (The All-knowing and Ever-present God)

What Did I Learn?

In this space summarize the most important insights you gained in this segment.

What Will I Change?

In this space write one thing you will do differently as a catechist because of what you learned in this segment.

Why Is the Bible Holy?

by Jack McBride

Why have these texts we call the Bible, from a distant past and from cultures so different from our own, survived the test of time? The reason is that throughout the ages, believers understood these words to reveal the Holy and to direct their lives on the path of holiness. They contain God's self-disclosure to us—beginning with the revelation of God to Abraham and the Chosen People and culminating with the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. In these books we recognize God, who comes lovingly to meet us and talk with us.

We believe that the Bible is inspired by God. By this we mean that these writings by human authors faithfully contain what God wishes to communicate. God did not take possession of the imagination or thought of the author and dictate to this person who, in some kind of trance, recorded it for the community. God's inspiration is not controlling, nor is it limited to the few to whom the books of the Bible are attributed.

The Church recognizes that inspiration was, first of all, a gift bestowed on the biblical community who first

recognized God's revelation in their lives and testified to that revelation. Later, this same gift compelled others to use that testimony in such a way that it could speak to a new time and to different communities. Still later, it was the gift of those who wrote down the oral testimonies and memories of earlier believers so as to preserve this holy tradition. Thus, to say that the Bible is inspired is to recognize the long process of divine inspiration which affected the growth, development, and interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

Because the Bible is inspired we also speak of its truthfulness and authority. The truth of Scripture can seem confusing to those who look at it with only a literal eye. First of all, there seem to be inconsistencies. Why are human beings created after the plants and animals in Genesis 1, and yet in Genesis 2 human beings are created the first living beings? Catholic biblical scholars remind and caution us that we should expect from Sacred Scripture only what it intends to offer to us. Scripture intends to share the truth of a

Jack McBride passed away in 2007. During his lifetime he was the author of numerous articles on adult religious education. He was the past chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on Adult Religious Education for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Education, and served as a United States representative and member of the International Adult Education Consortium. He also was a member of the planning team for several modules of the original *Echoes of Faith* program. Earlier in his career he served both as a Catholic school teacher and DRE in Ohio and Wisconsin. He was also an Associate Diocesan Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Madison, WI. He held a Master's degree in Theological Studies from Harvard University.

*We should expect
from Sacred Scripture
only what it intends
to offer to us.*

people's faith in God. Because the Bible is not primarily concerned with historical or scientific truth we must meet seeming contradictions with the question: What is the religious or theological truth to which Scripture is testifying?

The Bible is a testimony of God's self-revelation. But it is also the account of an ancient people who were transformed as they heard and embraced God's truth. We believe that today the Bible continues to

offer the occasion to hear and embrace the revelation of God and to transform our lives. This continuing power of the Bible's religious message is a sure sign of the Bible's truthfulness and authority.

The holy books of the Bible teach truth and transform a believing community. The truth of the Bible is not a truth for days gone by, but a living and active truth in our very midst. Let us honor this truth and invite and encourage others to be renewed through the Word of God.

For Reflection

Who has invited and encouraged you to embrace the Word of God through the Scriptures? Describe your experience.