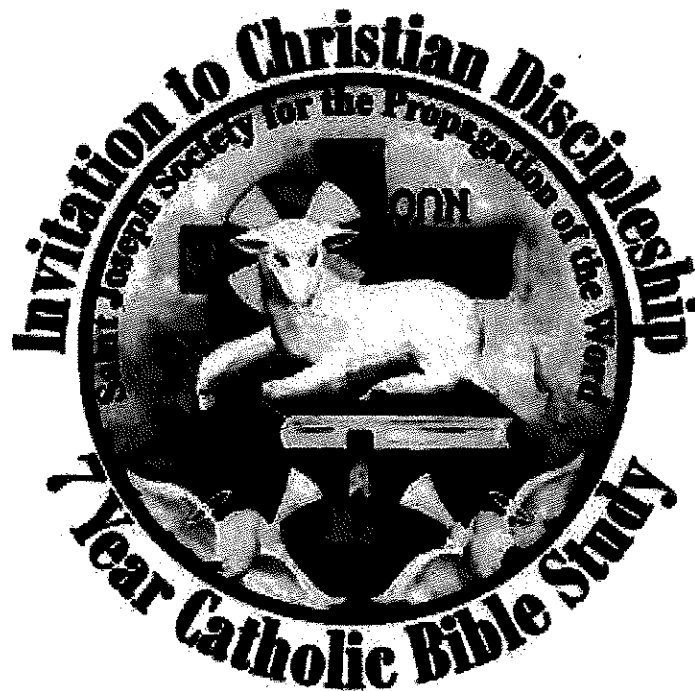


The Invitation

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT



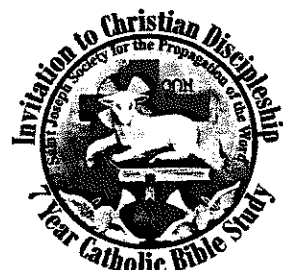
MEDITATIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

STUDENT EDITION

An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

James P. O'Bryan, S.T., Author and Presenter

It was the early 1970's when a group of laywomen in Orange, CA approached Fr. O'Bryan about the lack of Catholic Bible studies in Orange County. There was, of course, the Protestant group nearby that had signed up over 200 Catholics to their study. Father knew he couldn't do the work without a great deal of assistance. Volunteers stepped up to do the logistical tasks and Father worked with the Holy Spirit to provide the inspiration. This was the beginning of his "seven year sentence". Working 60 – 65 hours per week, he was never more than two weeks ahead, and most of the time he was working with less than a day to presentation time. His work was all hand written and needed to be typed and copied for distribution. These two hour sessions (1 hour sharing + 1 hour lecture) were attended by approximately 400 people weekly, split between a morning and an evening class. Father claims he never rewrote a word; "I didn't have the time," he said. He continues his writing today in Riverside, California.



Father's efforts resulted in a seven year study plus several spin-off works used for educating Catholics around the world. The seven year scripture study includes:



Fr. Jim

- The Invitation (Intro)
- The Gospel of St. Mark
- The Gospel of St. Luke
- Acts of the Apostles
- The Gospel of St. Matthew
- The Gospel of St. John
- Romans
- Hebrews
- 1 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Revelation

Other excellent teaching materials, often used in RCIA and formation classes, are the result of Father's dedication to the laity. These materials include "Christian with a Capital C," "Rock Foundation Revisited" and "On Eagle's Wings." In 2005, a group was formed to help publish and distribute Father's work. The **St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word, Inc.** has been instrumental in setting up a web site to take on the ministry of spreading the Gospel by promoting the instructional works of Fr. O'Bryan. **Materials available include teacher's manuals, student workbooks, CD's of lectures, and several inspirational works for RCIA and adult education.**

This study is designed to be presented by either the laity or religious. Each scripture study offers Teacher's Manuals, Student Workbooks and CD's. Instructions for starting a study group are included. These studies are accredited by the Catechetical Institute of Orange County and have the Imprimatur through the Bishop of Orange, California. Check our website for a study near you or start a study in your parish. We'll be happy to help you.

This is an "in depth" study of the scriptures so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself (Eph. 3:18-19).

<http://www.invitetodiscipleship.org> / (949) 842-9789 or (949) 387-6816 / 24 Boulder View, Irvine, CA 92603

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study Series



INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

St. Joseph Society for Propagation of the Word
24 Boulder View, Irvine, CA 92603
www.invitetodiscipleship.org

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INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

This introductory study, part of an eight-year study, is unique in that it contains the complete lectures as well as summaries and lesson questions. This study may be taught from the complete lecture or from the summary of that lecture depending on time available for your studies. The lecture provides a wealth of information that a new student will find well defined and informative. The summary, by definition, hits the high points. Other studies in this series are separated into the teacher's manual (complete lectures) and the student workbooks (summaries and worksheets). We hope you find the additional information available in this work a blessing. May the Word of God come to dwell within you.

Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that they may attain the fullness of God Himself (Eph 3:18-19).

The motivating force behind this study is the preservation and growth of the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. It has four immediate goals:

- 1) To ensure a true spirit of repentance;
- 2) To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ;
- 3) To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers;
- 4) To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

The Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California has accredited Invitation to Christian Discipleship. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed to be presented by lay or religious.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION

We are beginning a Catholic Bible Study designed for the laity so that, as Paul says,

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life. Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. (Eph 3:17-19)

JESUS OF NAZARETH stood up in the Temple of Jerusalem and extended the INVITATION: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me; let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: 'From within him rivers of living water shall flow'" (Jn 7:37-38). We, who will believe, have a call to be disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

DISCIPLESHIP

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IS SERIOUS BUSINESS. It demands serious people. On one occasion a great multitude came to hear Jesus. He preached to them the Parable of the Sower of Seed. All the seed was good but not all fruitful. The soil made the difference. Certain environments impede Christian discipleship. Certain living conditions are fit or unfit people for the Kingdom of God. As we enroll in a School of Christian Discipleship it is important to meditate on Jesus' interpretation of the Parable of the Seed. What is there in my daily environment that is hostile to the engrafted word of Jesus Christ? What is the ground of my being, the soil of my life?

Discipleship is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. We become a disciple of Jesus in order to become like the Master, to become His friend. St.

Paul encouraged: *“Put you on the Mind and Heart of Christ.”* Discipleship ends when we can in truth proclaim, *“for to me, ‘life’ means Christ. . .”* (Phil 1:21).

PRAAYER

To be a good disciple of Christ demands prayer. To the Christian disciples at Corinth, Paul writes:

The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such a teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way. (1Cor 2:14)

The Scriptures are not products of human minds but the Divine Mind. If we are to understand the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit of God must be their interpreter. Without illumination from the Holy Spirit our minds skip over the sacred words like a rock over a frozen pond. The Mind of Jesus is the perfect interpreter of Scripture. Paul makes a bold claim: *“But we have the mind of Christ!”* (1Cor 2:16). The Holy Spirit brings to us the Mind of Christ. This is what Jesus tells us in St. John’s Gospel:

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (Jn 16:12-13)

Prayer is the key that opens minds, hearts and bodies to the spiritual world. The Spirit illumines the mind and enables it to penetrate into the depths of the Word. The mind becomes like a bucket letting itself into a deep well. The promise of Jesus to the thirsty is realized--a river of living water flows within the soul.

Paul encourages *“at every opportunity pray in the Spirit, using prayers and petitions of every sort. Pray constantly and attentively for all the holy company”* (Eph 6:18). *“Draw your strength from the Lord, and His mighty power”* (Eph 6:10). *“In him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything”* (Phil 4:13).

If the study of Scripture becomes sterile, we need to ask ourselves, *“Has the life gone out of our prayers to the Holy Spirit?”*

REPENTANCE

All encounters with the Divine, sooner or later, demand human repentance if spiritual progress is to be made. Jesus loves us enough to insist we be, not what we are, but what we ought to be. Jesus is a patient friend, but grace has its day. *"If you hear the Voice of God today, harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:8).* In another place the psalmists say, *"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps 90:12).*

As disciples of Christ, we must expect to encounter Scriptures such as Colossians 3:5-9, 1Thessalonians 4:1-8, and Ephesians 5:2-7. These and many others will convict us of sin. Scriptures will admonish us. Encountering such Scriptures may be a stumbling block on our path. If we listen, we may hear an echo from the ancient synagogue at Capernaum: *"Do you want to leave me too?" (Jn 6:67).*

LIVING FAITH

As disciples of Christ it is not enough to pray and study to know God and His Holy Will, we must also endeavor to live the Scriptures--to clothe the teachings of Jesus once again with flesh and blood. In the teachings of James, the Christian character finds its proper balance. Let us turn to the Second Chapter of his Epistle and read verses 14-26. Here we see that living faith finds expression in Christian works. It is the fuel of its life! Paul leaves no doubt in our minds that Christian Discipleship ought to change our lives:

Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Over all these virtues put on love, which bind the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your heart, since as members of one body you have been called to that peace. (Col 3:12-15)

If Christian Disciples have a motto, it could well be 1Thessalonians 5:16-18: *"Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* What would prove us more spiritual?

CONCLUSION

Prayer, Study and Good Works are the essentials of Christian Discipleship. We must not grow tired of doing good. If we do not give up the race, we will win the prize. *"It is important that we continue on our course, no matter what stage we have reached" (Phil 3:16).*

BLESSED IS HE WHO HEARS THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEPS IT!

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHP

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

The primary purpose of this lesson is to **MEDITATE** on the requirements of **CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHP** and how we **PERSONALLY** can commit ourselves to discipleship. The decision made will affect your entire study of Scripture. Seek to spend a half hour daily in the study of Scripture. You receive in proportion to what you invest.

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (Please Memorize)

“MAY CHRIST DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH, AND MAY CHARITY BE THE ROOT AND FOUNDATION OF YOUR LIFE, THUS YOU WILL BE ABLE TO GRASP FULLY, WITH ALL THE HOLY ONES, THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT AND DEPTH OF CHRIST’S LOVE, AND EXPERIENCE THIS LOVE WHICH SURPASSES ALL KNOWLEDGE, SO THAT YOU MAY ATTAIN TO THE FULLNESS OF GOD HIMSELF.” (Eph. 3:17-19)

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 4:1-20, The Parable of the Seed

- 1. What does this Parable teach the Christian Community?**
- 2. What particular lesson does it hold for you?**
- 3. What do you see today as an obstacle in the lives of people to the acceptance of the Word of God?**
- 4. Personal Reflections: What is the ground of my own being?**
- 5. What in my environment impedes the Word of God in me?**
- 6. What will I do about it?**

SECOND DAY: Read Psalm 42; John 7:37-39.

1. What is the spiritual need being expressed in Psalm 42?
2. What is the invitation being extended in John 7:37-39?
3. How can Jesus answer the spiritual need expressed in Psalm 42?
4. What do I experience to be the spiritual need of my life?
5. What does this invitation of Jesus mean to me?
6. What positive actions are needed for me to accept discipleship?

THIRD DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

1. What lessons does Paul teach the Corinthians in these readings?
2. Why do some people fail to see the truth of the Gospel?
3. What is meant by “but we have the mind of Christ”?
4. What might be my mistake when reading the Scriptures?
5. What can I do to ensure a proper study of the Scriptures?

FOURTH DAY: Read Colossians 3:5-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, and Ephesians 5:3-7.

1. What does repentance in the Gospel demand?
2. From reading Ephesians 5:3-7, what would you say is the work of man in repentance?
3. What do I discern to be God’s Will for me?
4. What do I plan to do about it?

FIFTH DAY: Read Luke 11:1-13.

1. What do you think led the disciples to ask Jesus to teach them how to pray?
2. What is the importance of prayer in the study of Scriptures?

3. What do you think Paul means by praying “constantly and attentively”?

4. What can prayer do in my life?

5. What is my main difficulty in developing a prayerful spirit?

SIXTH DAY: Read James 2:14-26 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

1. What does “faith without works is dead” mean to us?

2. What does it mean to have a “living faith”?

3. What must I do to make faith more alive within myself?

4. How can I increase faith in my life?

SEVENTH DAY: Read Philippians 3:7-21.

1. What does Paul mean by verse 16?

2. What must we do to persevere in discipleship?

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

Jesus said to the Sadducees, *“You err because you neither know the power of God nor the Sacred Scriptures” (Mk 12:24)*. Each of us errs and is very much mistaken in opinions, ideas and actions because we do not know the power of God or the Sacred Scriptures. A total guidance by our intellect, unaided by grace, will leave us on the ground floor of scriptural truth.

St. Paul writes to Timothy: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for instructing in holiness, that the man of God may be perfect, fully equipped for every good deed” (2Tim 3:16-17)*.

Paul indicates these good effects of inspired Scriptures flow only to *“the man of God.”*

POWER IN THE WORD

There is power beyond human understanding in the words of Sacred Scripture. As written in the book of Hebrews:

The word of God is living and effectual [it is the “sword of the spirit,” Eph 6:17] more piercing than any two edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow. (Heb 4:12)

Jesus said to the dispirited disciples on the road to Emmaus:

How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! . . .and Jesus explained to them what was said about Him in ALL the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets. (Lk 24:25,27)

As Jesus spoke to these disciples their hearts were inflamed. We Christians are often foolish and dispirited, discouraged and despairing because we do not believe, in depth, the words of the Sacred Scriptures.

When the Scriptures are read in faith Christ speaks. The redeeming action of Christ in glory knows no succession of time. In eternity He speaks the words of eternal truth through the Scriptures in the present moment of time. Christ speaks to us this moment when we read or listen to the Scriptures. In *THE IMITATION OF CHRIST* (Thomas A. Kempis), Christ addresses these words to us: "*Write my words in your heart, then, and meditate carefully on them; they will be indispensable in time of temptation.*"

THE BIBLE

By the "Bible" we mean a collection of sacred writings that the Catholic Church has solemnly recognized as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Though we know the Bible as a large single book, it is really a library. The books of the Bible total seventy-three. The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew word from which "testament" is derived means a covenant, or contract, between God and man. We have two essential "testaments" between God and man: the Old Testament made between God and the Jewish Nation and People, and the New Testament made with the human race in and through Jesus Christ.

The books of the Bible were written over a period of fifteen hundred years. The first book, GENESIS, ascribed to Moses, was written in the 12th or 13th century B.C. The last book, the APOCALYPSE, ascribed to St. John the Evangelist, was written prior to the year 100 A.D. Some parts of the Bible were written in Hebrew, some in Greek, and some in Aramaic.

With the Old Testament Scriptures, the Catholic Church follows the Greek Septuagint Bible, a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures made by seventy (the meaning of *Septuagint*) Jewish translators at Alexandria, Egypt. The work was begun around 288 B.C., and completed around 100 B.C. Of the 350 quotations from the Old Testament found in the New Testament, 300 of these were taken from the Greek Septuagint. The Septuagint was accepted and used by the writers of the New Testament.

The Old Testament has seven complete books (Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees) and sections of two other books (Esther 10:4-13, 11:16; Daniel 3:24-90, 13, 14) that are not considered inspired by Jews and Protestants. The Protestant Reformers rejected seven books of the New Testament as uninspired. The books they considered not inspired are Hebrews, 1Peter, 2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude, and James. At a

later date some of these books were placed back in the Protestant Bible and listed as apocryphal, which means doubtful. The Catholic Church possesses, protects, and defends the whole and complete Bible!

THE GOSPELS

The word *gospel* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "good message." The Greek word, *evangelion*, carries the same meaning of "good news." Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the four accounts of the Gospel. These men are called the four evangelists, as they are the bearers of the "good news" of God in their written works.

Matthew must have written between 60 and 85 A.D. He wrote the Gospel for the Jews of Palestine. He begins with a genealogy that connects Jesus Christ with the whole history of the Jewish people. He emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. This Gospel was the most used and quoted in the early Church.

Mark wrote while he was with Peter in Rome. Tradition fixes the date of its (his) composition between 58 and 70 A.D. Mark wrote for the Christians who had converted from paganism. He presented to them a picture of Christ, the Son of God, as the King who has complete power over the visible and invisible world. His Gospel is called the Gospel of the Power of Christ.

Luke, according to early Christian sources, is author of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The Gospel and the Acts appear to be a continuous story told in two parts. Scholars have concluded that Acts was written prior to 63 A.D., and the Gospel between 58 and 62 A.D. Luke wrote for a Grecian audience. Christ was presented to them as the fulfillment of the dream of Greek philosophers and poets. Jesus is the Perfect Man.

John wrote his Gospel at Ephesus sometime between the years 90 and 100 A.D. John wrote for the Greek converts. He states his purpose in writing:

Many other signs, then, Jesus did in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His Name. (Jn 20:30-31.

AUTHENTICITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible stands on the claim of being the written testimony of God's dealings with man. To know that this claim is true is of utmost importance to us. In order to use the Gospels to support the claim of Jesus Christ, we must first prove them to be authentic. By authentic we mean that the document has been written by the person reported to have written it.

For Christians, the testimony of the Jewish revelations stands or falls with the Christian revelation. If the testimony and proofs of the Four Gospels can be accepted concerning the divinity of Jesus we can accept the Old Testament. Jesus Christ gave direct and indirect testimony to the truth of the Old Testament.

From the numerous writers of the early Church, not one dissenting voice concerning the authenticity of the Gospels can be found. These men knew the Gospels. Some of them knew the writers of these Gospels. These men were not only willing to live the Gospel, but to die for it. Many of them did!

These men lived at a time when it was possible to obtain first-hand information concerning the writers. It would be unreasonable to reject their testimony to the authenticity of the Gospels.

One of the strongest arguments for the genuineness of the Gospels comes from the enemies of the early Church. Such enemies as Celsus, Porphyrius, and Julian the Apostate were learned enough to know that if the foundation is destroyed, so is the edifice. These men attacked the teachings of the Gospels, but they never attacked the Gospels as being forgeries. So well known and established were the Gospels at the time that such an assault would have been useless.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

For the next five weeks the Scripture readings will be varied. They have been chosen to prepare you spiritually for the study of the Scriptures. Prayerfully meditate on them and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in answering the daily questions. Do not worry if you cannot answer all the questions. The Holy Spirit may wait to give you the answer during communal sharing. Your daily meditation on these Scriptures is the important element. The questions are to aid and direct your meditation, and your answers are to aid in your communal sharing.

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

(Please Memorize)

“FAITH IS CONFIDENT ASSURANCE CONCERNING WHAT WE HOPE FOR, AND CONVICTION ABOUT THINGS WE DO NOT SEE.”(Heb 11:1)

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 12:18-27.

1. How do the Sadducees compare “with many modern men?”
2. According to Jesus, why do many men err about the truth?
3. What did Jesus answer the Sadducees?
4. What is meant by the “Bible”?

SECOND DAY: Read Romans 1:18-32

1. According to St. Paul, how can a man know God?
2. What happens when man fails to acknowledge God in his life?
3. What does this reading reveal about our society?
4. What is meant in the Scriptures by “Testament”?

THIRD DAY: Read 1 John 1:1-10

1. According to the reading, what do the Scriptures proclaim?
2. Why do disciples preach the teachings of Jesus?
3. What does John see to be the great obstacle to accepting God?
4. What is meant by the Septuagint Bible?

FOURTH DAY: Read Hebrews 11:1-13

1. What is faith according to this text?
2. What does verse 6 mean to you?
3. How was faith expressed in the life of Abraham?
4. What books are held by the Church to be inspired in the Old and New Testaments, but not accepted by non-Catholics?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 9:14-29

1. What is Jesus' attitude toward disbelief?
2. What do you understand by verse 23?
3. What does the response of the boy's father in verse 24 teach us?
4. What is the meaning of the word "Gospel?"

SIXTH DAY: Read John 12:37-42.

1. What does verse 37 tell us about disbelief?
2. Why did certain men refuse to believe in Jesus?
3. What freedom did these men in verse 42 lack?
4. Why do we call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John "Evangelists"?

SEVENTH DAY: Read John 9:18-23.

- 1. How do you feel about the answer given by the parents?**
- 2. Can you give a modern example of this type of behavior?**
- 3. Could you stand up for what you believe if it meant being socially isolated?**
- 4. What do we mean when we claim the Gospels to be authentic?**

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

Compose a prayer for Faith!

CHAPTER 3

THE GOSPELS

We must now determine if the texts we have today are substantially the same as the originals. The oldest complete translations of the Gospels date back to 350 A.D. They are Greek manuscripts written on vellum, a parchment made from calfskin. Today's Gospels are in harmony with these dating back to the fourth century. If any change occurred in the Gospels, it would have been in the two hundred year period between the destruction of the originals and the Greek manuscripts.

In the writings of the early Christians, the Fathers of the Church, we have noted an abundance of Scriptural quotations. It is said to be possible to take the whole substance of the Gospels right from the works of the Fathers. From what evidence we have, it appears that the quotations from the Fathers all substantially agree with the translations we now possess.

ARE THE GOSPELS TRUE HISTORY?

We have sufficient external evidence to assure us that our copies of Scripture contain the Gospel story as written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Do these writings relate true history?

The evangelists actually claim to be writing history and not fiction. St. Luke writes as the beginning of his Gospel:

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in our midst, precisely as those events were transmitted to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. . . (Luke 1:1-2)

As Paul indicated to King Agrippa in Acts 26:26-27, at the time of the writing of the Gospels many people still lived who had witnessed these things. They would have been quick to correct or deny the Gospels. The Gospels' claims were accepted by all the early converts to the Christian Community. The facts they relate are confirmed by non-Christian historians, particularly Josephus.

The findings of archaeologists entirely support the Gospel information.

From the time of the so called "Age of Enlightenment", the Bible has been a target for a steady barrage of critical artillery. No ancient writings have been subjected to more exhausting tests. The proofs for the reliability of the Gospels as true historical evidence are stronger than for any other and ancient document. The investigations of hostile critics have strengthened the proofs for belief in the genuineness of the Gospels as historical evidence.

Resting on firm foundations, the Gospels are worthy of belief. The Apostles or their disciples wrote them. Their account of Christ and His teachings have come to us without any serious change. The Gospels claim to be history. We have the strongest proofs to assure us that the writers knew the truth and conveyed it with simple honesty.

THE INSPIRED WORD

The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible is more than an historical document. Each book of the Sacred Scriptures was composed by a man writing under the inspiration of God. The word inspiration comes from the Latin word *inspirare* meaning, "to breathe into". By "inspiration" we mean a supernatural power by which God so moved and stirred the sacred writers to write that they wrote all and only that which God commanded them to write, and that they conceived this in a correct way and recorded it with absolute accuracy. The pages of the Sacred Scriptures themselves manifest the Hand of God writing in men's souls.

To know for certain that the Sacred Scriptures are inspired we must look beyond the Book itself and what is written therein. If God poured His Spirit into the writers of the Sacred Scriptures then the truth of the facts can only be made known by God. Jesus Christ established a living community, a Church with the responsibility to teach Divine Truth until the end of time. The Scriptures testify to the fact that the Church is the mouth of Divine Truth in this world.

We do not argue in a circle: The Gospels are proven first to be historical documents worthy of belief. As historical documents we use them to show that it's an historical fact that Christ did establish a Church. Scientific research establishes the Gospels as historical documents. The Church merely proclaims that these historical documents are the inspired words of God.

THE INERRANCY OF SACRED SCRIPTURES

It is a dogma of the Catholic Church that the Scriptures are free from error. The First Vatican Council proclaimed:

All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and so far is it from possible that any error can co-exist with inspirations that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the Supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true.

It is a dogma that the Bible is free from error, but this teaching is to be understood as applying only to the original text of the inspired author and in the sense intended by the authors. This means that inerrancy is to be understood only of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek original texts of the Bible. Reproductions of these texts, editions, versions, translations or revisions are not guaranteed to be free from error. The Latin Vulgate Bible is the official translation of the Church. It is guaranteed by the Church to be free from error in matters of faith or morals.

The Sacred Scriptures are guaranteed to be free from error in the sense intended by the author. It is the purpose of scriptural translators to determine what the sacred writer intended to say in any given passage. If the commentator faithfully expresses the thought of the original author, he is free from error.

It was the intention of the sacred writers to teach Religion not Science. It happens in some cases that a religious truth is intimately connected to a scientific truth. For instance: the unity of the human race is taught in Genesis. In this case, the sacred writers must be held as being scientifically accurate.

In other cases, the sacred writers describe scientific facts as they appear. At times the sacred writer furnishes the readers with a popular account. Our Lord Himself was not averse to using popular ideas or manners of expression to instruct His followers as, for example, when He referred to the mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds. In such instances the scientific accuracy of the example was not the point of the narrative.

The Second Vatican Council presents the Holy Scriptures as reflectors of divine light for our lives:

Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face.

From the students of the Scriptures the Council asks the “obedience of faith.”

The obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.

The Council encourages us to an intelligent and scholarly understanding of these Holy Scriptures. When we teach and instruct with the Sacred Scriptures we are, in some degree, interpreters of these Scriptures. Out of love for the Spirit of Truth, we ought to teach and instruct as wisely and honestly as possible. The Council teaches:

The interpreter of Sacred Scriptures, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To interpret a text of Sacred Scripture isolated from the whole of Scripture and the traditions of the Church have led many teachers into serious error. For this reason, the Council teaches:

...no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith.

The Council ended the document with this hope:

Through the reading and study of the sacred books, let the word of the Lord run and be glorified (2Tim 3:1), and let the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church increasingly fill the hearts of

men. Just as the life of the Church grows through persistent participation in the Eucharistic mystery, so we may hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word, which lasts forever.

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

THE GOSPELS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

(Please Memorize)

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED OF GOD AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING--FOR REPROOF, CORRECTION AND TRAINING IN HOLINESS, SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE FULLY COMPETENT AND EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

FIRST DAY: Read Luke 9:23-26; 12:8-12.

- 1. What do these Scriptures teach us about an open expression of faith?**
- 2. What does this have to do with the Holy Spirit?**
- 3. What do you see as a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?**
- 4. How would you explain to someone that the Gospels are true history?**

SECOND DAY: Read Luke 8:40-48.

- 1. How does this afflicted woman express her faith?**
- 2. What two physical things occurred in this healing?**
- 3. What does this reveal about the importance of faith?**
- 4. What is meant by divine inspiration?**

THIRD DAY: Read Matthew 14:22-34.

- 1. What does this reading teach you?**
- 2. What do you think about Peter’s request in verse 28?**
- 3. Why do you think Peter’s faith failed?**
- 4. How can we be sure the Bible is inspired?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 24:13-35.

- 1. What do these two disciples have in common with the Sadducees of Chapter 12 in Mark?**
- 2. What is revealed to us here about the Old Testament?**
- 3. How should we read the Old Testament?**
- 4. What is meant by the “inerrancy” of the Sacred Scriptures?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Chapter 55 of Isaiah.

- 1. What are we invited to do in this reading?**
- 2. What do you understand by verses 8 and 9?**
- 3. How should these two verses direct our study of Scriptures?**
- 4. What does “The Bible teaches religion and not science” mean to you?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Deuteronomy 11:18-32.

- 1. What does the lord encourage in verses 18 through 21a?**
- 2. In general, what does the above Scripture teach?**
- 3. What could we do to make the Scripture more present in our home environment?**
- 4. What is meant by “obedience of faith”?**

SEVENTH DAY: Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- 1. What Scripture has especially impressed you?**
- 2. What is your favorite Scripture?**
- 3. Can you give an example of anyone you personally have known whose life was changed by reading the Scriptures?**
- 4. What are some of the guidelines from the Second Vatican Council for studying the Sacred Scriptures?**

CHAPTER 4

THE SPOKEN GOSPEL

The writings of the New Testament grew out of the life of the early Christian Church. We have a period of approximately thirty-five years of Christian life when the Gospels as we know them did not exist. How did the Gospels come to us?

The early Church was composed of Jewish men and women who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Son of the Heavenly Father and the Savior of His people. This early Christian Community dearly preserved the memory of Jesus. His words and deeds were kept alive. These words and deeds formed Christian tradition. They were not compiled for the purpose of enlightening a future generation but of evangelizing their own people for whom they had a particular moral responsibility. There was urgency within the community that disregarded a media so slow and painstaking as writing in favor of fast verbal proclamations.

SPREADING THE GOSPEL

The evidence from apostolic time suggests a three-part scheme for preaching the gospel existed. First, the message or the *kerygma* about Jesus Christ was briefly preached. Second, the message was defended with scriptural proof. Third, a response was demanded in the form of repentance, belief and baptism.

By means of persecution, the Gospel came to the Gentiles. As the Jews were to refuse it, the Gentiles would accept it. The Gospel had a new audience and a new media of expression was needed. The universal language of Greek became the verbal media of proclamation. The Greek Septuagint Bible was indispensable in this mission.

Around 56 A.D., Paul wrote to the Corinthians, converted about five years earlier, that he had preached to them what the Apostles preached, and their faith had come through hearing the Gospel preached. Normally, the Gospel was verbally preached; for extraordinary reasons it began to be recorded.

THE PASSION NARRATIVE

Paul summed up his preaching in one sentence: "*I would speak of Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1Cor 2:2). This emphasized the importance in the mind of the early Church of the death of Jesus Christ. In the light of the Resurrection and by illumination from the Holy Spirit, the Church realized the glorious mystery of the redemption of the human race through the death of Jesus. The records of the Passion events appear in the Four Gospels with a similarity unequaled elsewhere in the Gospels. The Passion Narrative is most probably the first part of the written Gospel to have been solidified in a written form.

HALAKHA AND HAGGADA

The divergences in recording the other events in Our Lord's life suggest that they were not regarded by the early Church in the same way.

The words and deeds of Jesus manifested God to be with Jesus by the divine display of wisdom and power and, more importantly, that God Personally had entered into human history, changing the course of the age. Illustrations of this divine power in the world were important in the spreading of the Gospel. The Church ministry did not demand that these divine deeds be reproduced in their context and fullness.

The words and deeds of Jesus formed Christian tradition. The early Church was grounded in Jewish tradition. The Jewish community distinguished between two kinds of tradition: *Halakha* and *Haggada*. The Halakha tradition handed on the rules governing life and worship. Haggada handed down traditions concerning historical events and the theological interpretations and speculations of the respected Jewish teachers. Halakha tradition was the most sacred, and demanded obedience from the people. The Haggada tradition demanded respect. It encouraged speculation and discussion.

The words of Jesus would have been treated as Christian Halakha and the deeds of Jesus as Christian Haggada. An excellent example of Christian Halakha incorporated into the written Gospel is the Sermon on the Mount. Written Aramaic versions of Christian Halakha and Haggada no doubt existed in the first century.

These two different sources would have been available to the authors of the Four Gospels. In the weaving of this material into their accounts, greater freedom would have been allowed with the deeds (Haggada) of Jesus.

THE PARADIGM

The teachings and examples of Jesus needed to be presented in as simple and uncontaminated form as possible. This obligation created within the early Church a unique literary form called the paradigm. Paradigms were short, concise illustrations from our Lord's life used for teaching and preaching purposes. They formed the earliest Christian narratives. We have in Mark 10:13-16 an example of a paradigm incorporated into the written Gospel:

People were bringing their little children to Him to have Him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when He noticed it and said to them: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. It is just to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. I assure you that whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it." Then He embraced them and blessed them, placing His hands on them.

The paradigms have certain characteristics: first, they are independent narratives—self-contained units. The paradigms can be lifted right out of the Gospel narrative without destroying the continuity of the Gospel story. Second, the paradigms are brief. They deal only with the elements essential to clarifying a main thought. Third, like settings for lovely jewels, the paradigms give prominence to the words of Jesus.

The paradigms are believed to be the only form in which the traditions of Jesus would have survived in a Church looking for an imminent Second Coming of Jesus, seeking to keep itself unspotted from this world. The history of the church was transmitted at this time in sermons and in teaching techniques.

In the Gospel of Mark we discover five other examples of pure paradigms.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. The Healing of the Paralytic | Mark 2:1-12 |
| 2. Question of Fasting | Mark 2:18-22 |
| 3. The Ears of Corn | Mark 2:23-28 |
| 4. Relatives of Jesus | Mark 3:31-35 |
| 5. Anointing of Jesus | Mark 14:3-9 |

Many of the paradigms known at the time of the Gospel composition were woven into the narrative of the Gospel story. As they became material to be read, they lost the pure form of the paradigm. The written Gospel brings a blending of the paradigm and the instruction that followed the paradigm. A good example of this can be seen in Mark 10:17-3.

THE SPOKEN GOSPEL
DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(Please Memorize)

“THERE IS ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM; ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL, WHO IS OVER ALL, AND WORKS THROUGH ALL, AND IS IN ALL. EACH OF US HAS RECEIVED GOD’S FAVOR IN THE MEASURE IN WHICH CHRIST BESTOWS IT.” (Eph. 4:5-7)

FIRST DAY: Read Hebrews 3:7-19.

1. How can one discern “an evil and unfaithful spirit”?
2. In what way are we encouraged to help one another?
3. How are we to become partners to Christ?
4. Can you describe the three-fold method of evangelization in the early Church?

SECOND DAY: Read Job 42:1-10.

1. What do verses 1 through 6 teach you?
2. What character of spirit does Job display?
3. What was the sin of Job’s friends?
4. Why did the early Church preach instead of write?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 2:41-51.

1. What does the reading indicate about the words of Jesus?
2. When Mary did not understand His words, how did she deal with it?
3. What characterized Mary’s attitude toward Jesus?
4. What would have been treated as Christian Halakha in the early Church?

FOURTH DAY: Read Jeremiah 18:1-10.

1. By what means does God teach Jeremiah a divine truth?
2. What does this teach you?
3. Can you give an example of how God has instructed you in some common occurrence of your life?
4. What would have been treated as Christian Haggada in the Church?

FIFTH DAY: Read Genesis 12:1-12.

1. Why is Abraham the great example of faith in the Old Testament?
2. What was the result of his faith?
3. Did this ancient act of faith affect your life?
4. What is a paradigm?

SIXTH DAY: Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22.

1. According to verse 15, why does God enter into a Covenant with the Jewish people?
2. What does God demand from a Covenant-people?
3. Why did God invite you into the New Covenant?
4. Can you find an example of a paradigm in John's Gospel?

SEVENTH DAY: Read Psalm 23.

1. What is the relationship being expressed in this Psalm?
2. What does "the Lord is my shepherd" mean to you?
3. If the Lord is your shepherd, what is your role as a sheep?
4. What was the first part of the Gospel to be written?

**SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT
COMPOSE A PRAYER OF PRAISE TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD!**

CHAPTER 5

THE MIRACLE STORIES

The telling of tales was traditional in the biblical world. It would have been natural in such an environment that the verified miracles of Jesus should have stimulated miracle stories. Gifted narrators artfully weaved the miracles within colorful and picturesque backgrounds.

Miracle stories are illustrations of divine power. They were the revelations of the divinity within Jesus. They were told in order to manifest, in a unique way, the truth--Jesus is Emmanuel, "God-with-us". They were created to contrast Jesus with the miracle-worker myths of the time. These stories reveal Jesus to be incomparable.

The second intention of the miracle narrator was to demonstrate the unique relationship existing between God and Jesus Christ. A real distinction of nature between Father and Son was erased by the miracles. The age of miracles continued through the ministry of miracle-workers within the Church.

The third purpose for the miracle stories was to stimulate belief in miracles and present examples for the miracle-workers to follow. They served as instructions for the ministry of miracles. Formulas and gestures guided the Christian healers in their ministry, instructing them how to act in like circumstances. Like the Paradigms, the Miracle Stories are usually independent and self-contained units. For an example read Mark 1:40-45.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not only a Gospel of the word but also a Gospel of power. By its preaching, men were saved. By the working of miracles, God's dynamic power manifested itself in the world. Both the preaching and the miracles led men to confess that "Jesus is the Lord!"

PERSONAL TRADITIONS

The evangelist incorporated the Passion Narrative, the Paradigms, and Miracle Stories into the written Gospel. These now comprise the largest portion of the written account. These composed the essential elements of the Gospel accounts.

It is to be expected that other events, and persons related to Jesus, would have had importance to the early Christians. Personal traditions developed around people closely related to Jesus. These were circulated for the edification of the faithful who sincerely desired to know Jesus in a more intimate way and to know something of the holy men and women who were part of His earthly life.

The personal traditions are human-interest accounts. They are interested in the secondary persons and events surrounding our Lord's life. Some personal traditions, even though they occupy a relatively small section, were incorporated into the written Gospel. In the recording of personal traditions, for a brief moment the Gospel spotlight lingers on persons and events that are relative to Jesus but of secondary importance. The Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary is one of the most endearing personal traditions incorporated into the Gospel. This has been recorded in Luke 1:26-38.

THE CHRIA

Luke, the only non-Jewish evangelist, unsurprisingly introduces into the Gospel account a literary form common to contemporary Greek literature. We discover the *chria*.

A *chria* is a short, pointed saying with a general application. It is occasioned by a specific person responding to a specific situation with a quick, sharp thought. It grabs attention and stimulates thought because of its brevity and depth. In a sense the thought expressed in the *chria* surprises the mind and encourages meditation. We find the following example in Luke 8:20-21:

Jesus was told, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you." He told them in reply, "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it."

The forming of Jesus' words into a chria, the reduction by Luke of larger scenes into smaller pictures, the shortening of introductions to highlight words were departures from the traditional method of handling Gospel material. They indicate the secular style the Gospel material was entering around 75 A.D. and represents a Church that is applying the Gospel to its own time and a new culture.

This completes our review of the early Christian society and their ministerial needs that supplied the material for the written Gospel. It should enable us to understand the similarities and differences between the Gospel accounts, particularly those of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which are called the **SYNOPTIC GOSPELS**. In the Greek *synoptic* means "similar." They are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because the three are similar to one another.

THE MIRACLE STORIES
DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(Please Memorize)

“GOD HIGHLY EXALTED HIM AND BESTOWED ON HIM THE NAME ABOVE EVERY OTHER NAME. SO THAT AT JESUS’ NAME EVERY KNEE MUST BEND IN THE HEAVENS, ON THE EARTH, AND UNDER THE EARTH, AND EVERY TONGUE PROCLAIM TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!” (Phil 2:10-11)

FIRST DAY: Read 2Timothy 1:6-13.

- 1. How can we stir into flame within our lives the gifts to us of the Holy Spirit?**
- 2. What does this mean to you: “With the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the Gospel entails”?**
- 3. How can the following be applied to our Christian life: “Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us”?**
- 4. What are miracle stories?**

SECOND DAY: Read 1Timothy 6:3-13.

- 1. How does Paul look upon people who do not teach sound doctrine?**
- 2. What does Paul teach by “such men value religion only as a means of personal gain”?**
- 3. Explain what verse 6 means to you.**
- 4. What is the purpose of miracle stories?**

THIRD DAY: Read 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

1. What is being taught to us in verse 2?
2. How can verse 7 be applied to our study of the Scriptures?
3. What does, "there is no chaining the Word of God", mean to you?
4. What three sources of early Christian writings were incorporated into the Gospel accounts?

FOURTH DAY: Read Acts 20:17-36.

1. What two essential teachings of the early Church are found in verse 21?
2. What words of our Lord are found in this passage and nowhere else in the New Testament?
3. In the mind of Paul, where do the enemies of Christian Truth come from?
4. What are personal traditions?

FIFTH DAY: Read Philippians 1:12-26.

1. According to Paul, what is the most important work of his life?
2. Why do you think he places such emphasis on this?
3. What does verse 21 mean to you?
4. Why did personal traditions find their way into the written Gospels?

SIXTH DAY: Read Romans 15:1-13.

1. How should others be dealt with in our Scripture studies?
2. What does verse 4 tell us about the study of Scripture?
3. What does verse 5 teach you?
4. What is *chria*?

SEVENTH DAY: Read Ephesians 6:11-17.

1. In the mind of Paul, what is the great enemy of our spiritual life and the study of Scriptures?

2. What is our defense?

3. What do the weapons (shield, sword and helmet) mentioned by Paul mean to you?

4. What does the introduction of the literary form of *chria* into the Gospel account illustrate?

CHAPTER 6

THE MESSAGE OF MIRACLES

Many of the miracles recorded in the New Testament demonstrate Jesus to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Through the prophets we learn of a period of supreme divine intervention into the life of God's people, a period overflowing with divine mercy. It would be the day, Isaiah prophesied, that the Lord would comfort Zion and turn her deserts into gardens, the time when suffering and imprisonment would come to an end.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn.
(Is 61:1-2)

In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus applied these very words of Isaiah to himself. He affirmed: *"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4:21).

The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, worked out of compassion for the multitude, demonstrated God's care for His people, and the abundance of blessings to flow out of the Messianic Age. Not only did the miracles of Jesus fulfill Scriptural prophecy, but, in keeping with the spirit of the Old Testament, many of them were symbolic. As the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had once done, Jesus also performed symbolic actions to illustrate His ministry. Luke indicates that the miraculous catch of fish was symbolic of the great numbers to be won for Jesus by the apostles and disciples (Lk 5:10).

THE MESSAGE OF MIRACLES

Though many miracles of the New Testament fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and others were symbolic of the Kingdom of God, they are but

a small part of the message of miracles. In the second century, the essential message of miracles was obscured. The miracles in the Gospel were used to defend the divinity of Jesus and the divine origin of the Church.

There is no question that the miracles worked by Jesus caused people to wonder, admire, and lead many to faith. Nevertheless, Jesus refused to perform miracles solely to prove Himself. He foretold that false prophets would come, working miracles and deceiving the elect (see Mk 13:22).

In later Church life, miracles became testimonies of the sanctity of the miracle workers. Introducing the sanctity of miracle workers into the ministry of miracles only confused the message of miracles more. In the first ten chapters of the Gospel according to Mark, 200 out of the 425 verses are devoted to the miracles of Jesus. If almost one half of this material is devoted to the miracles of Jesus, we can conclude that miracles essentially convey the message of the Gospel. The message of the miracles is the message of the Gospel!

THE TWO KINGDOMS

The ordinary term for miracles in the Synoptic Gospels is *dynamis*, an act of power. The Apostles picture Jesus as a dynamo of divine power who has entered into the human race. Mark 1:23-28 presents a confrontation between the power of Jesus Christ and the power of Darkness. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God confronts the Kingdom of Darkness. The miracles of Jesus are connected with the coming of the Kingdom and cause the Kingdom to come. The miracles of Jesus were weapons to overcome Satan and his reign.

In the eyes of the New Testament, the position of Satan is summed up in the words of John, "*We know that we belong to God while the whole world is under the Evil One*" (1Jn 5:19). This was written when the Church was already growing old in the world. There is a dominion of Satan over men that results in bondage.

It is no accident that all three of the Synoptic writers began the public ministry of Jesus with the presence of Satan. At the very beginning, we are informed that the Coming of the Kingdom involved war with Satan. Satan had dominion and would not yield it to God without a fight. In the public ministry of Jesus, the two kingdoms are pitted against each other.

THE DOMINION OF SATAN

The attitude of Jesus toward sickness manifests a relationship between physical and mental disorders, and spiritual disorders. He implied that it takes the same power to undo one as the other. *"Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'"* (Lk 5:23). Jesus rebuked illness as if the illness itself were a personalized evil, distinct from the afflicted person. He rebuked a fever in the same way He would rebuke a demon. *Mastix*, a word often used for sickness or plague, implies some kind of punishment or whipping, almost as if it were directly inflicted by Satan.

As we follow Jesus through His public ministry, we realize our concept of "savior" is somewhat limited. Jesus does not distinguish between saving a body and saving a soul. The entire person is spiritually and physically regenerated by the Savior's touch. For this reason the supreme proof of Jesus' triumph over Satan and sin is the resurrection of the body from the dead. St. John the Evangelist culminates the public life of the Savior with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, demonstrating that Jesus, as Savior, is the "resurrection and the life."

St. Paul teaches us that Satan had established a certain dominion over all Creation, and man awaited its deliverance in agony. The Scriptures tell us that the great struggle at the end of time will shake not only the souls of men, but also the very sun and stars (see Mk 17:24-26). In Mark 4:37-41 we have an excellent example of Jesus meeting the power of Satan in nature. After the command of Jesus, the sea became as tranquil as the possessed man in Capernaum had become when the demon departed. The coming of the Kingdom of Christ restored order to man and nature.

It is not by accident that Jesus worked many miracles on the Sabbath. God had rested from the work of creation on the Sabbath. In Jesus, God has risen from His rest and He re-creates, as He establishes His dominion and renews man in His own image and likeness. This is the message of miracles!

EPILOGUE

Many Scriptures demonstrate that faith is needed for a person to become a receptor of the divine power flowing from Jesus Christ. Faith calls forth the dynamic, divine energy of Christ. It represents a readiness to accept the Will of God, His Dominion. God's power in this world is brought to fullness by faith and is hindered by infidelity. Faith can open the door for the ministry of healing within the Church. Faith can put the power of God at the service of men so that they can work miracles. Faith varies from initial trust in Jesus' power to complete belief in His Divine Person.

Faith thrives, deepens and increases through exercise and, as obvious from Scripture, through the presence of divine power--the miracle!

THE MESSAGE OF MIRACLES

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

(Please Memorize)

“PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD SO THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THE TACTICS OF THE DEVIL. OUR BATTLE IS NOT AGAINST HUMAN FORCES BUT AGAINST THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS, THE RULERS OF THIS WORLD OF DARKNESS, THE EVIL SPIRITS IN REGIONS ABOVE.” (Eph 6:11-12)

FIRST DAY: Read Deuteronomy 18:15-20.

- 1. What does Moses prophesy in these Scriptures?**
- 2. Can you see Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy?**
- 3. Name some ways that Jesus is like Moses.**
- 4. What did the miracles worked by Moses in Chapters 13, 16, and 17 of Exodus reveal about God?**

SECOND DAY: Read 1Kings 17:16, 20-22.

- 1. What is the difference between the miracles worked by Moses in Exodus and those worked through Elijah?**
- 2. What stimulated these miracles of Elijah?**
- 3. What do they reveal about God?**
- 4. Why did some people believe that Jesus was Elijah?**

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 4:14-21.

- 1. What is foretold by Isaiah in verses 18 through 19?**
- 2. What does this Scripture illustrate about Jesus?**
- 3. In what way does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?**
- 4. What purpose do these miracles serve in the ministry of Jesus?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Luke 9:10-17.

1. What is symbolized by this miracle?
2. Can you recall a miracle similar to this in the Old Testament?
3. Can you name other symbolic miracles worked by Jesus?
4. What can be learned from these symbolic miracles?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 1:23-28.

1. What does this miracle reveal?
2. What especially amazed people about this miracle?
3. What was the significance of such a miracle?
4. What does the word miracle mean in the New Testament?

SIXTH DAY: Read Luke 11:21-22; Genesis 3:1-7.

1. What lesson do we learn about Genesis in Luke 11:21-22?
2. Why does John write that all the world is under the dominion of the Evil One?
3. What is implied by Satan's dominion?
4. What are some of the effects of this dominion?

SEVENTH DAY: Read Matthew 12:22-30.

1. What do these miracles of Jesus proclaim?
2. How is the Reign of God demonstrated in this world?
3. Why is the Resurrection from the dead the greatest miracle?
4. What is the real message of miracles?

ESTABLISHING A CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR PARISH

The Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

By James P. O'Bryan S.T.

This Bible Study is designed to be presented by the laity but it may also be presented by religious. The number of participants will determine whether the study should be presented in the parish hall, class-rooms, or in homes. Some parishes have fifty or more people wanting to attend. (When this study was first presented by Fr. O'Bryan, it drew from the entire diocese, not from just one parish. There were 200 people at both the morning and evening session for the seven years...that's right, 400 people each week attended the study in one place.)

Many groups, large and small, still prefer to use the original (and recommended), method because it provides the fullness of the work. First, the full lecture, or an edited version, is presented by a "lecturer". The lecturer should spend time in prayerful preparation each week before presenting the material, and it should be presented with enthusiasm. Tapes and CDs of Father's original lectures are also available for purchase. They often are used in place of a lecturer. Listening to his recorded lectures at leisure, and being able to pause and replay them provides a wealth of information each week.

The homework portion of the study calls us to obedience and daily prayer as we strive to complete our assignment. Homework is a major factor in our personal spiritual growth. How much time will you give to God? The recommended method requires 2 hours each week as a group and additional study time at home, but the rewards are tremendous. This format may be used in homes or parishes.

A variation on the above, used successfully with High School groups (as large as 50) and adults, is to present the Summaries in place of the full lecture. Homework is assigned, answers are shared in a group, and then the Summary is read for the following week. All students have their printed assignments or workbooks. Homework may be trimmed to one or two questions per day for high schoolers (they already have homework to do). This method can reduce a session to about one hour total rather than 2 hours. This method is useful for severely time-challenged people, but the summaries only include about 20% of the complete lecture. However, the purchase of the recorded lectures which can be listened to during the week may be useful in providing a fuller experience for those who are unable to attend the full sessions.

A more recent method has also been successful for small home groups. Instead of using the Lectures and a lecturer, only the Bible and the Summary/Worksheets or Meditation Workbooks are used. Group members take turns reading aloud the Summary and the Bible references in the workbook--answering the questions as they go along. This eliminates the requirement for homework. A leader is still necessary at each meeting--one leader can be chosen for the whole study, or the attendees can take turns. (Note: Again, listening to parts of the recorded lecture in free time during the week may be helpful in providing more than the 20% of information given in the Summary. Also, the homework portion, though a pain to many, has a place in our lives as we strive to be more obedient to God's call).

All of the above styles have proven to be successful for different people in different situations. Start one in your community today!