

## The Bible

The Holy Bible is an essential book to understanding the Sacraments and Jesus. It is the written record of God's love for us. Every chapter in all of the books refers to the Bible in many ways. The Bible has 2 main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament has the story of how God was present in the time before Jesus' birth. The stories in the Old Testament are wonderful! Many of the types of stories and the way stories are told are based, consciously or not, on these stories. We don't get to read many of them this year but in future years you will get to. I highly recommend that you just read them.

The New Testament has 2 parts as well: the Gospels and the Epistles or letters. The 4 Gospels tell the story of Jesus what he did. The Epistles are about what happened after he left and what happened then. They were letters written to the new converts in the first churches. They are full of awesome lessons and insight into what God wants us to do. If you go to Mass every day for 3 years you will hear almost every word of the New Testament. If you go every Sunday, it will take a bit longer, maybe 10 years, but you will hear the whole thing. Now there are apps that will read it to you. You can listen to the Epistles in less than 30 min for each one. Try it!

Some key things to know about the Bible is that it was not written in English. It was not written in Spanish, either. It was written in Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic. Every Bible is a translation. If you know English and Spanish, you know that sometimes it is hard to get the exact meaning of something across between languages. The Bible is the same way. The result is that we have many different translations of the Bible. I pointed you to one version online so that we can be consistent. Personally, I have many different translations of the Bible in English and I love to read something in several different versions. Just hearing how the different translators tried to say the same thing gives me a better idea of what it really means. I also love to listen to the radio show on Relevant Radio called *Father Simon Says* because he likes to read one of the readings for the day and look up the meaning in the original Greek, Latin, Hebrew or Aramaic. He often discusses the sense of the word. It is really cool!

There are several different ways that you can read the Bible and you can do these at different times or even at the same time. The Bible, however, is a unique book in that it is the only book I have ever read that can give you a new meaning every time you read it. Or even every time you hear it. Try it!

One way to read the Bible is to just read it. Don't try to understand it too much when you read it this way, just take in the story and don't worry about things that you don't understand. Skim over things that seem boring (read them quickly but don't try to make sense of them yet). Just get the basic content. This way, you get a basic familiarity with what is in the Bible, and if you read it from the beginning, you can see how it was put together. You get to read the best stories and just enjoy them as stories.

Another way to read the Bible is to try to see what God is saying in this part. That is often what the homily is about in Mass. What does this mean? What is God saying? For this, you often need to read just a little bit. Help from others is often good. The Bible was not written in the way that we write things today. It is God trying to tell us something.

Yet another way to read the Bible is to try to tie it to history. Keep in mind that it was not written as a history book. People made assumptions that you would know things that we just don't know. The

books of the Old Testament are not put in the Bible in Chronological order. They are in order by size, for the most part! These stories were first passed down by word of mouth. In those days, re-telling a story accurately was important. Everyone used their memories much more than we do. Finally they were written down but they didn't have book, typewriters, computers, or even paper. The scrolls used were made of sheepskin and had to be made special for each writing. They would start writing with the longest book and, if there was room, add a shorter book. There were many scrolls used for the text of what we now call the Bible. Eventually, someone came up with the idea of a book and the writings were gathered together. They still had to be written by hand and not everyone could have their own copy. When you read the Bible it is a good idea to try to understand the author of that book and what life was like for him and what was important to him. It will help you to understand what he was writing about.

Another thing to keep in mind when you are reading the Bible is that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit caused the writer to write what God wanted us to know. Each person wrote it in his own way but he was conveying God's message to us. This is evident in many ways from the value we get from every part of the Bible to the simple fact that it has survived as a living, useful document that has not changed in all this time.

Do not read the Bible as a Science book. Some people try to understand the Genesis story of Creation as literally true. If God made the world in 6 days it must mean 6 24-hour periods of time. But think about it. At first there was no world. There was no sun. How could there be a 24 hour day? Even in English, day does not always mean a 24 hour period. The day of the dinosaur lasted a bit more than 24 hours. ;) The true point of the story in Genesis is that God made everything out of nothing. Everything was created by God – except God, since He already existed. Numbers in the Bible also have special meaning besides just a number. Look them up in a good Bible reference!

So you are going to be reading from the Bible this year. And you will be reading far too much of it on your own. Please email me or whatever when you have questions, or bring them up in class. You should have questions. If we were in a classroom we would be reading these together and answering questions as we go. But with remote learning, you will just have to ask questions.

The Bible is also divided up into books. The names of the books and the page they start on is usually found near the beginning of paper Bibles. For the online Bible, you can click on the name of the book. Books are divided into chapters. To be able to find a particular place in a chapter numbers have been given to verses. Sometime a verse is an entire sentence and sometimes it is part of a sentence. References are a way of indicating where we want to look for something in the Bible. It looks like this <Book name> <chapter number>: <verse number> A dash can be used to include more than one verse in what you should look at. So today we will read Genesis 1:1-2:4 which means the book of Genesis, chapter 1 from verse 1 to the end of Chapter 2 verse 4. Got it?

Don't forget: The Bible is an awesome book. It is worth reading on your own and in every way!