

The Study of Holy Scripture

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"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." (Colossians 3:16)

Our pious lay brethren in Christ should not forget and neglect a very beneficial gift of God's compassion for their spiritual edification: the study of Holy Scripture.

Assuredly, it is possible for one to study Holy Scripture, but certain questions of necessity arise: Does the "word of Christ" abide in such a student "richly"? Is this so each time that he studies it? Does he know Holy Scripture sufficiently? Is it a shining guide and arbiter of his life? Does it have great power and influence over him?

The Holy Fathers advise us to undertake the unceasing and pious reading of the Holy Scriptures in such a way that this continual effort may familiarize our hearts with the teaching of Christ and that our minds might be literally bathed in it: then our actions will more easily and more naturally come into concord with the Gospel.

In this vein, let us note that Saint Pachomios the Great, the very Father of coenobitic monasticism, knew the Holy Gospel by heart and, prompted by Divine Revelation, imposed on his disciples the duty of memorizing the Gospel, so that it would always accompany and guide them.

Special care must be taken, so that the Book of Life is not read intellectually, for "lofty flights," or out of curiosity and simply to gain knowledge: we are required to read Holy Scripture with our actions, by putting it into practice, so that its Life becomes our life.

We shall understand this better when we take heed of the following truth, one so simple but so profound: The New Testament begins with the Holy Gospel of Saint Matthew, which directs us to the "practice" and keeping of the Commandments, and it concludes with the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, which guides those who have been purified by "practice" to union with our Lord, to "vision" ["theoria"].

But let no one think that the study of the "word of Christ" is an easy undertaking, or that it is achieved by our own mental skills: prayer, with a spirit of contrition and humility, is indispensable in order that the Divine Comforter might open the eyes of our souls and that the Divine Truths might be revealed to us.

Likewise, insofar as the interpretation of the Divine Texts is a gift of the Holy Spirit, we ought sedulously to avoid our own "easy" interpretations and have recourse with confidence to the hermeneutical perspectives of the Holy Fathers of our Church.

It should also not escape our notice that in Holy Scripture there is nothing insignificant and unworthy of attention; on the contrary, everything in it radiates the Light of Grace, and, consequently, it should be studied with much reverence, attentiveness, and dedication.

The God-Bearing Teachers of our Faith advise pious Christians to study the Holy Gospel standing, out of respect for the Sacred Words. Of course, one can study the Divine Word kneeling or sitting down—and this by condescension—, but in such a circumstance, reverence, fear of God, compunction, and attentiveness should dominate the soul.

Saint John Chrysostomos preserves for us an astonishing example of reverence toward the Sacred Books of our Holy Faith: The Christians of his age had a custom, when they were about to read any Sacred Book, of first washing their hands and then taking up the Book; and men read it with their heads uncovered, while women covered their heads!

"We immediately brace ourselves and wash our hands, when we wish to take up a Book. Do you see how much reverence there is before the reading? And a woman, even if her head is uncovered, at once puts on her kerchief, displaying a sign of her inward piety; and a man, if he has his head covered, bares his head. Do you see how the outward clothing becomes a herald of inward piety?" (Saint John Chrysostomos, Homily LIII on the Holy Gospel of Saint John).

Therefore, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!"