



Conference 4 | His Personal Invitation in Holy Scripture

Transcript

The theme of our retreat is How to Live in the Presence of God, and how in our daily life we are able to keep this contact with the Mystery of God. We have spoken already about the presence of God in nature, in the human person of Jesus, in the Eucharist, and now we are going to speak of the presence of God in His Word, the Word of the Scriptures, the Biblical Word, which is also for us another means to be in contact with God. When we read the Scriptures, and more importantly when we keep it in our heart, this **Holy Scripture is capable of communicating to us the presence of the Lord**. So let us ask this grace from the Virgin Mary, and the Gospel of St. Luke tells us that Mary kept all those things in her heart, and that we also are capable of keeping in our heart certain words of the Bible, and through that the Lord can be present in our life.

Hail Mary . . .

The Church and all of humanity go through very difficult moments sometimes, but the Lord is faithful. He will never abandon us, and He remains close to us. I believe that in the world of today there are two main means through which the Lord accompanies us . . . strengthens us. Two forms of nourishment that are principled and very important through which He nourishes His children, which are, as a matter of fact, what we receive every time that we celebrate the Mass where on the table that the Church has prepared for us, **there are two forms of nourishment, the one of the Word, and the one of the Eucharist, the Body of the Lord**.

We are in need of this Bread of Life which is the Eucharist and we have spoken of this already, but we are also in need of this other nourishment, food, which is the Word of God. It is the Word that we find in the Scriptures themselves, in the Book of Deuteronomy, which Jesus Himself quoted when He was in the temptation in the desert. Man doesn't live only of bread. Man doesn't live on bread alone, but he lives of every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord.

I believe that some of the needs, **the most important in man are the needs for Truth, and I believe that the Scriptures communicates to us this Truth**, this light which is so important and



necessary. But, it is not simply a Truth; it is also a Presence that the Scriptures give us. **God dwells truly in His Word** which means that every time that we receive in our memory, in our heart, the Word of the Holy Scriptures, it is also a manner or a way in which we allow God to come and dwell in our heart. So, obviously, of course, this Presence is not always felt in a very sensitive way, sometimes it is mysterious, but it can also be revealed in a strong way in different moments of our life.

I would like to start by reminding ourselves from a text from the Second Vatican Council which was a council that invited very strongly the Christian people to live of the Holy Scriptures. It is true that often in the Catholic Tradition, we didn't read very often the Bible. It's become a lot more frequent that in the Protestant faith you will find their Bible in their hand. But thankfully, things have changed now.

So, in this document which is called Dei Verbum, which speaks to us about the revelation and the Scripture tied to the Tradition, there is this beautiful and strong invitation to us that all the Christian people should and must nourish themselves with the Word of God, because through the Scripture and the writings it is the Father, Himself, who comes down to speak to His children. So, we are going to read a few verses I believe it is from the paragraph 12 from Dei Verbum. I am not very sure because I do not have the direct reference under my eyes. Let us read these certain verses.

“For in the Sacred Books, the Father who is in Heaven, meets His children with great love and speaks with them, and the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church. This strength of faith for Her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.”

So these are very simple words, but very beautiful that the Council addresses to us, which tells us that through the Holy Scriptures, it is the Father Himself who comes to meet us; and that what we find in the Holy Scripture is this strength for our faith, and the nourishment for our soul, and the source which is pure and permanent of every spiritual life. More and more that our spiritual life is based in God, and on the Scriptures. More and more it will become pure and profound.



It is true that this discovery of the Presence of God in the Scripture is not always as simple because there are many texts in the Scriptures that might seem to us a little bit strange. They may be a little bit difficult to understand. They might even shock our mentalities and our understanding sometimes. There are sometimes certain obscurities in the Words. Obviously, this is very normal. **Often, we are in need of help to be able to understand more profoundly the Word of God**, to understand in which historical context they speak, and the progressive character of the revelation; but, never the less, what is very beautiful, is that if we approach the Scripture with love and with faith, if we believe truly that this is a Word that the Father Himself desires to communicate to His children, if we ask from the Holy Spirit to come and help us and enlighten to us the words of the Scriptures, little by little, things will become more beautiful and more enlightened. Obviously, we cannot understand everything in a perfect manner in a few days, but if we seek God in a sincere manner in the Bible, the Holy Spirit will aid us to discover many treasures.

There are certain words that are very full of light and they are very strong for us. Sometimes we are in front of certain verses that we have heard very often but we didn't always understand fully what they mean, and one day, we receive a grace and the meaning of these verses becomes very clear. And, I believe that this is something that all Christians can live. This is not only reserved to the great wise people, but I believe that this is true for each one of us.

If we take for example, someone like St. Therese of the Child Jesus who died extremely young at 25 years old, never has she done any particular studies, but the Lord had given her a great love for the Bible, not simply from the New Testament, but also many texts from the Old Testament. We cannot separate the two. The majority of the great lights that she received, she found them in the Scriptures because she had this great thirst and this trust that she can find God in the Scriptures.

I believe it is the same thing for us, you see. What makes that the meaning of the Scriptures will be revealed to us little by little . . . it's not simply the studies that we do. Even if, of course, studies could be extremely useful, we cannot despise them. It would be very good to participate in a certain class or a study of a Biblical sort, but I believe what is the condition, the most important for the Bible to begin to speak to us . . . it's not the science or all the studies that we could do, **but it is our desire for God, our faith, and our prayer when we approach from the Bible, I would also say even, it is our desire of conversion.** I think at the end of the



facts, the purpose of the exegesis, what makes that the Scriptures begin to illumine us and enlighten us, is when I take my Bible in my hand, I approach the Scriptures and I start to read a text, . . . Lord I beg you, give me your grace. Give me your light. I believe truly that it is Your Word that I am holding in my hand. I want and I desire that this Word enlightens me, and I want that this Word touches me, and I want that this Word could purify me and renew me, and that your Word would transform me and make of me a better person. I believe, Lord, in the strength of your Word. **If this is our interior attitude, this will be how little by little, what was mysterious in the Scriptures will begin to be revealed and unveiled.**

Of course . . . not completely. There will always be things that we will need to discover; but we can never the less, have some very beautiful revelations in regards of this phrase or that verse of the Scriptures . . . even personal things that come to enlighten our own personal life. Obviously we need to read the Bible in the fidelity to the Tradition of the Church. We should not look at things in a fantasy way. But it is very beautiful that from time to time, we can make this experience where a text which was written so very long time ago, a text for example from the Prophet Isaiah or from the Psalms, or a text from the New Testament, of course, all these texts that were written in a context culturally and politically extremely difficult (different?) from ours, never the less, they come to talk to our hearts. Sometimes we are really profoundly moved by a certain passage in the Bible, and we have this feeling this text was really written just for me! For me today! It is truly the word of which I had a great need today, and this was exactly what I was in need of understanding and of hearing which is given to me by a text in the Bible, because the **Lord knows my desire, my thirst, and my will.**

I can tell you a little bit of a personal experience. There were a few years ago, I was going through a difficult moment in my life. I was a little discouraged. I was exhausted, and I made the decision to make a retreat for about a week in a monastery. So, I went in a Benedictine Monastery that was not very far from my house, and there I participated in the prayer of the Monks about a week long. I did the Divine Office, the Lauds, the Vespers. It is so beautiful, this Divine Office which is sung by the Monks and these Psalms are sung one after the other while alternating groups. And they were sung on melodies that were so peaceful and gentle. It was really good to dive in this prayer which was sung by the Monks.

So, there were these verses of the Psalms that came one after the other, and there at this one moment when they were singing a Psalm and in the middle of the psalm there was a verse. This verse said very simply the following thing, and it said “find again your peace my soul



because the Lord wants only good for you.” This little verse moved me immensely. **I felt that it was truly the Word that the Lord Himself prepared for me.** And that through this word of David or the author of the Psalm it was the Lord, Himself, who spoke to me directly and He told me the following: “My dear Jacques, do not worry. Find again your peace. Be in peace because the Lord loves you and He only wants good for you.”

You see, I was not in need of anything else and I believe that that Word was sufficient to calm me down and it permitted me to take my path, to follow, and continue the path of the retreat in the Monastery. **In here, I think this is an experience which is valid for everybody.** I believe that each one of you has experienced in your life a certain light from the Scriptures that touched you and that was for you a source of peace, of consolation, and through that Word, it’s the Lord who is so close to us.

Like a Psalm tells us, the Word is here, it is all very close to your heart. **The Lord makes Himself close to us through His Word.** So, I believe it is each one of us who has this possibility to be able to be nourished and fed by Scripture. We will not always feel an extraordinary experience every time we open the Bible. Often, on the contrary, it will be dry which is very normal; but if we are therefore faithful, when we come close and do come close in the Scriptures in the moments where that is necessary for us, the Lord will know how to use the Words of the Bible to come meet us. There is something also very beautiful in the Bible, is that through those Words the Lord speaks to our hearts and addresses us, but also He answers us. (Excuse us, Father corrected himself. He said No . . .) He gives us the words to respond to Him because it is obvious in the Bible there are often words of prayers and there are many words that we are able to use for our own prayer.

Finally, it’s true; the most beautiful prayer that we can address to God is already the prayer which exists in the Bible. It could obviously be the Psalms, even if they’re not all always easy to understand but it is also all the prayers of many people in the Bible which is a prayer that becomes our own prayer ~ the Prayer of the Church.

I made an allusion yesterday to the prayer of the Disciples of Emmaus who made this prayer to Jesus. “Remain with us Lord because the night has come and the day comes to its end.” This can also be our own prayer or maybe the prayer of the Centurion in the Gospel, “Lord, I am not



worthy that you come under my roof, but say only one word and I will be healed or my servant will be healed.” This prayer of this Roman Centurion . . . he could not really imagine this . . . he could never have imagined that his prayer would become the prayer of all of the Church, the prayer we repeat every time we go to Mass. And, like this, we can find a thousand other examples of prayers which exist in the Bible of this person or that person which have become also our own prayer.

It is God, Himself, who gives us words to pray to Him. We don't know on our own, often, how to address God. Sometimes we don't find the correct words, you see, but that's not terrible. It's the Lord, Himself, who hears us. At the same time, we could say that in the Bible God put it at our own disposition . . . at the disposition of man . . . all the words that we can possibly have a need to use for prayer either to praise Him, or to give Him thanksgiving, or to ask for His help and His aid, or to ask Him for mercy for our own sins. All the words that we need to be able to address God, we find them in the Bible. This gives to our prayer a certain Truth and a certain strength which is very beautiful. I would even say that God, Himself, must be moved to hear the words that He Himself had given us to pray with. So, it must be a source of a blessing for us.

I would also like to make another remark and that is the fact for us to frequently visit the Scriptures. This can give us a lot of consolation, a lot of light, a lot of strength. It is St. Paul who speaks of this consolation which we find in the Scriptures, and this is also a word that sometimes is capable of shaking us very deeply. **It's a Word that comes to work on us in the profoundness of our heart to purify us . . . to renew us.** It's actually not man who works on the Bible. It's the Bible that works on man. I would like to cite a passage from the Letter of St. Paul to the Hebrews in which he speaks of how the Word of God is like a sword that comes to penetrate the heart. So, it's in the Letter to the Hebrews, in the Chapter 4, the verses 12-13. “For the Word of God is living and active sharper than any two edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart and before Him, no creature is hidden but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.” The author uses an image which is very strong which is that the Word of God is like a sword with two edges which penetrates deeply in our heart and that nothing is hidden in the face of this Word and that Word has the power to put everything in light . . . all the deep intentions of the heart of man. In this text, he speaks of this point of joints and division between the spirit and the soul. So this sword is, in a sort, makes an operation (surgery) between the soul and the spirit and it separates them. What is the separation? It is a



separation between the spirit and our psychology . . . our soul . . . what comes from the spirit of God, what is deep, what is True, and it is our spirit and what it has in it . . . everything that is True and authentic. A good spirit which sometimes acts in us. But on the other side we have our wounded psychology, what comes from pride, what comes from fears, what comes from our human ambitions, etc., etc. What this really means is that little by little, **when we accept this Word in our lives, we dispose our life to the light of the Word of God.** A little by little, this Word will operate in us a discernment. It gives us a certain light and this Word will come to help us little by little to understand what is good, what is coming from God, Himself, what is the movement of the spirit that we can follow; but, it also will show us our sin, our wounds, and it will show us our ways of thinking, of acting that are not conformed to the Gospel. They are not conformed to what is good and to what is True and it operates a certain work of discernment in our heart.

When we read the Scriptures and we visit often the Word of God, we take a certain risk because the Word doesn't always tell us everything that we would like to hear. Sometimes there are things to which we turn the deaf ear. We don't have a desire to listen to them, we don't want to listen, until the day our heart opens up, and then we accept what this Word is trying to tell us. We try to run away from right to left. This is not possible. The Word tells us no, you cannot run away to the right or to the left. Here, there is something that you **must** change. In your mentality, in your behavior, you must change; **but this is always for the sake of becoming more free. The Word of God is never a Word that discourages us when we read that Word in the Truth of the Holy Spirit.** If ever there was a Word of God that led me to despair, it was not the Holy Spirit who was trying to explain it to me then. Even the devil is capable of using the Scripture to take us to despair, but when we read the Scripture in the grace of the Holy Spirit, sometimes it could shake us really strongly, but at the same time, it encourages us.

This is the way of conversion that you must live, but I am with you. I am not against you. I am with you, to come help you, and aid you, and walk with you on the path. **When this Word gives us a light, it will also give us the strength to go in the sense in which it was guiding us.** It's always a Word that is imperative . . . oh excuse me . . . it is always a Word of a Father, a Father who wants what is good for his children.



So, it is very good for us to take this habit to never let a day go by without taking a few moments to read the Scriptures. It could be the text of the Mass; it could be a book of the Bible that we are reading continuously one after the other, but to always take moments like this in the same manner that we take every morning a little breakfast. Sometimes nothing at all happened in particular, but if we are faithful to seek God in the Scriptures, from time to time you will experience something very beautiful. We end up receiving a lot of encouragement, a lot of lights from the words of the Bible.

I would like to make a remark on our Word of God in the Scriptures. You know that when we read the synoptic Gospels, especially the Gospel of St. Mark, when St. Mark tells to us the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, there is something that he alludes to which is important and that is the authority of Jesus.

St. Mark tells us for example, I think it's in the very beginning of the Gospel of St. Mark, in the first chapter, he tells the story of a man who was liberated from an evil spirit by Jesus. He says that the crowd was astonished by the authority of which Jesus spoke . . . **in** which Jesus spoke, and that He didn't speak like the scribes but He spoke with authority because the scribes always had to lean and make reference to the authority of someone else, but Jesus spoke in His own authority. Even if that could shock someone, because He would say, "It was told to you . . . and then. . . I tell you." Mainly this authority of Jesus was manifested in its effectiveness. So, what is this new teaching? He commands with authority to the impure spirits and they obey Him.

I believe that this authority of the Word of Jesus, the authority of the Word of God is something very, very positive for us. It is an authority that carries us, that strengthens us, that heals us. **I believe that in our human fragility we have a need to lean upon the authority . . . the Divine Authority.** I believe, sometimes, it could happen in our existence that we would be in a certain situation, we live moments that are very difficult with of a lot of worry, and anxiety, and fears; and, we don't really know what solutions we can find to our problems. Sometimes we are a little like someone who has a scale in front of them with both sides of the scale; and the scale can tip to one side or the other depending on what we put on the one side of the scale. On one side of the scale, we have all the reasons to worry because of this or that problem, because of this or that difficulty; and on the other side of the scale we try to put all the reasons for which we need to be reassured and to calm down. I have this and that problem and this difficulty, but I'm going to find the solution for it; but, we end up asking ourselves . . . will this solution work?



Maybe it's not going to work and then the scale tips to the other side, or maybe I will do this and it will tip to the other side again. And, you see, our scale is always like this hesitating between the right or the left and we don't really know exactly to which side it is going to lean more. Is it going to lean on the side of the worry, or is it going to lean on the good side which is the side of confidence and trust and peace. And, sometimes we acknowledge that our human reasonings are not sufficient and if we want that scale to tip to the right side, which is the right side of trust, we are in need then to put on that plate of the scale something that would have a lot more weight than just the human word, and more weight than the reflections of man and the reasoning of man . . . **something that has more authority which means the Word of God.**

There are certain situations like this that we go through . . . situations of confusion . . . and what is going to permit to us to find trust again. It's not to think a lot and to try ourselves to find all of the solutions, but to remind ourselves of a Word from the Scriptures . . . to remind ourselves of a Word from God Who has exactly this authority. It's not simply man who keeps the Word, but it is the Word that keeps man. We are invited to keep that Word of God in our heart, because it is exactly according to how we keep that Word of God in our heart that **that** Word will also guard us and keep us, and it will protect us, and it will help us, and we can live this and make experience of it in many circumstances of our human existence.

Sometimes, I feel that I am alone, I am abandoned, and here is when I remind myself of the Word of Jesus. **"I will be with you all the days until the end of the times", and in that Word I find my strength.** Sometimes I find myself so poor and such a sinful person that I find it impossible for me and I've made so many mistakes and here I recall the word of Isaiah that says "even if your sins were black like carbon, like coal, I will make of them white like snow, or I will remind myself of the Word of Jesus Who says "I did not come for those who are healthy. I came for those who are sick. I did not come for the just, but for the sinful." You are feeling like a sinful person? Like a sinner? Rejoice because that means that Jesus has come for you! You are in need of Him, so He came for you. Never go to despair because of your poverty. We can give a thousand examples like this . . . how in certain situations that we're quite fragile at the human level, and situations that could have really worried us. There is always a Word from God that can come to our aid and it could give us again faith and hope. That's the beautiful experience lived by the Disciples at Emmaus of which we spoke already. When Jesus accompanied them while explaining to them the Scriptures and it was while receiving that Word of Jesus that they found faith again, and they found hope again, and they were also strengthened in Love. They



said to each other, “Our heart was burning within us when He talked to us about the Scriptures.”

The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures, it has a specific and particular strength and grace. It’s the grace to strengthen our faith, to encourage our hope, to nourish and develop our love. That’s why it is very important to visit the Scriptures frequently day after day. Sometimes it will be in a certain dryness, but if we are faithful to seek in the Scripture the nourishment of which we are in need; sometimes, from time to time, we will find treasures. We will find pearls. And, we find verses that come literally to carry us and on those verses we can truly lean. **Jesus said Heaven and Earth pass away, but my Word will never pass away.**

So let us ask this grace from the Virgin Mary and to all the Saints that have come before us to have this love for the Scriptures, to have this thirst to seek God in His Word and that His Word could, therefore, nourish our faith, our hope, and our charity. I think that today this is not an option. There are so many contradictory discourses that we hear, right and left. So many words that are vain, not useful, and superficial. So we find that in our life, we are obligated to lean upon that Truth and this Word of light, the Word of consolation and encouraging which is given to all of us through the Bible. So let us together give thanksgiving to our Father in Heaven and let us ask Jesus that He would open us to the intelligence which is in the Scriptures. This is one of the gifts that the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, had made to His Apostles. He did it for the Disciples of Emmaus. St. Luke tells us that just after the return of those disciples to the others in Jerusalem and that they told them that Jesus had appeared to them again and He opened our heart to the intelligence of the Scriptures. Let us ask this grace one for the other and for the whole Church that the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit of Jesus opens our heart and our intelligence and the Scripture will be truly our light and our strength.

Amen.