

ST. FRANCIS AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule and Bible

Begin with someone reading from our *Rule*, Article #5.



Cimabué: St. Francis,
ca. 1277-1280

Bonaventure writes of St. Francis: “Whenever he read the Sacred Books, and something struck his mind he imprinted it tenaciously on his memory, because he did not grasp in vain what his attentive mind heard, for he would mull over it with affection and constant devotion.” When asked about friars studying Sacred Scripture, he replied: “I am indeed pleased, as long as, after the example of Christ, of whom we read that he prayed more than he read, they do not neglect zeal for prayer; and, as long as they study, not to know what they should say, but to practice what they have heard and, once they have put it into practice, propose it to others. I want my brothers,’ he said, ‘to be Gospel disciples and so progress in knowledge of the truth that they increase in pure simplicity without separating the simplicity of the dove from the wisdom of the serpent which our eminent Teacher joined together in a statement from his own blessed lips.’”¹

An exchange between St. Francis and his minister indicated the depths of Francis’ absorption of the Scriptures, which set the tenor of his way of life: “On another occasion, at the time of his eye disease, he endured such pain that one day a minister said to him: ‘Brother, why don’t you have one of your companions read to you from the prophets or other passages of Scripture? In that way, your spirit will rejoice in the Lord and receive great consolation.’ He knew that he rejoiced greatly in the Lord whenever he heard the divine Scripture read to him.

“‘Brother,’ he answered him, ‘every day I find so much sweetness and consolation in my memory from meditating on the humility of the footprints of the Son of God that, if I were to live till the end of the world, I’d have no great need to hear or meditate on other passages of Scripture.’”²

We know, of course, that as he was dying, St. Francis asked for the reading of the Scripture passage from St. John’s Gospel about Jesus gathering with his disciples at the Last Supper (*see John 13*).

Francis of Assisi prayed and meditated with the Sacred Scriptures to learn more about God – about reality, about priorities in life, about love – His Church, God Himself. He was totally “God-centered” and respected all the ways that God has tried to communicate with us – the Scriptures, the Church, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ Himself. He knew Christ to be the model, the teacher (Word), the lover sent by the Father – and Francis found Him in the Scriptures.

Q1. How do I use the Scriptures in my daily life?

Q2. Have I read the “*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*” (from Vatican Council II)?

Q3. Have I come to know the differences between Catholic interpretation of the Bible and Christians of other faith traditions? What are the similarities and differences?

St. Francis ends his *Admonition VII* with the words: “And those people are brought to life by the spirit of the divine letter who do not attribute every letter they know, or wish to know, to the body but, by word and example, return them to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs.”³

St. Francis wrote *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua* in which he told Anthony: “Brother Francis sends greetings to Brother Anthony, my Bishop. I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers providing that, as is contained in the Rule, you ‘do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion’ during study of this kind.”⁴

In St. Francis’ *A Letter to the Entire Order*, he stated: “Because whoever belongs to God hears the words of God, we who are more especially charged with divine responsibilities must not only listen to and do what the Lord says but also care for the vessels and other liturgical objects that contain His holy words in order to impress on ourselves the sublimity of our Creator and our subjection to Him. I, therefore, admonish all my brothers and encourage them in Christ to venerate, as best as they can, the divine written words wherever they find them.”⁵



Miniature Excised from a Psalter: Christ in Majesty with Symbols of the Four Evangelists, 1230 [Christ is seated within a cusped frame representing his aura.

He is surrounded by the 4 “living creatures” – the Gospel writers – as envisioned by St. John in his Apocalypse: a winged man (St. Matthew), a lion (St. Mark), an ox (St. Luke), and an eagle (St. John).]

In his *Testament* St. Francis wrote: “Wherever I find our Lord’s most holy names and written words in unbecoming places, I want to gather them up and I beg that they be gathered up and placed in a becoming place. And we must honor all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us spirit and life. And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.”⁶

Q4. What is the difference between Divine Revelation and Sacred Scripture?

It is hard for us to grasp the seriousness contained in this statement which the Church attributes to St. Jerome: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ!” How well did St. Francis live this declaration!

Q5. What do Jerome’s words tell me about my personal O.F.S. search to draw closer to Christ? How does my life reflect the meaning of his words? St. Francis set an example for me to follow. How can I follow up on this challenge?

Q6. Have I ever taken time to read and study the instructions printed in the beginning of my Catholic Bible? Would now be a good time to do so, or to review?

For further reflection see the *Catechism*, §65 – §67; §96 – §100, and §134 – §141.

¹ FA:ED, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Vol. II, pp. 612-613, Chapter Eleven: The understanding of scripture and the spirit of prophecy, v.1

² FA:ED, *The Assisi Compilation*, 1244-1260, Vol. II, p. 181: 79: He replies to a brother who encouraged him to have Scripture read to comfort him

³ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Admonitions*, Vol. I, p. 132: VII: Let Good Action Follow Knowledge

⁴ FA:ED, *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua*, after November 29, 1223, Vol. I, p. 107

⁵ FA:ED, *A Letter to the Entire Order*, 1225-1226, Vol. I, p. 119, vs. 34-35

⁶ FA:ED, *The Testament*, 1226, Vol. I, p. 125, vs. 12-14