

Scripture Reading & Study Topic at Team Meetings

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The Team Meeting provides a sacred space; a nurturing ambience wherein spirituality grows and flourishes.

Scripture and Study are seen as necessary nourishment and guidelines along the journey of each soul and each community, keeping the vision of God alive for us on the way to life. Scripture and Study open up space for new experience beyond our normal ones. They do this by exploring, purifying, intensifying and celebrating our everyday experiences. The task of Scripture and Study is to keep the human being alive and active in the divine-human exchange.

The vital elements of Scripture and Study are more than texts and dogmas to be known. They are experiences to be entered into. They draw us into the adventure of exploring the personal and communal transformation that union with God makes in our lives. Many of our texts are like holy menus compiled of essential teachings and formulations. But known faith must become lived faith. Remembering the items on the menu is one thing: being nourished by the actual food is another. We must become the truths we learn. As food is useless until it is consumed thus transforming our bodies, so all the beliefs in the world will not nourish and save our souls unless, and until, they are welcomed by heart, mind and spirit.

There is a great joy in exploring and 'doing' Scripture and Study; they provide a meaning, a context and a resonance for our very being as Christians. One of the reasons for our difficulties with texts and doctrines is their loss of relevance for our lives. Beliefs are not ends in themselves. They exist to bring us to a deeper understanding of the inexhaustible mystery that is God and God's involvement with us. Once study or belief loses contact with experience, they become empty formulas with no personal meaning.

Our task is to recognise the heart of God in the heart of life, to recognise the divine presence active in all human presences, to decipher God's signature written indelibly but often faintly, across all of creation. This vision, established once-for-all in the incarnation, is continually renewed within the soul of the world by the Holy Spirit. And the church and sacraments testify to the truth and eternity of that vision. It is all of a piece. Everything belongs. We need eyes to see the integrity and profound simplicity of God's incredibly beautiful plan for the world. We are encompassed in a warm embrace way beyond our wildest dreams. Only our creative imaginations can begin to lay hold of this shy mystery.

Vatican II's *The Church in the Modern World* makes it clear that in the past we over-emphasised the notion of two distinct worlds – one profane, the other sacred. The radical distinction between sacred and profane, between nature and grace, has been overcome in the person of Christ. In Christ it is revealed that the locus of the divine is the human. In him it made manifest that God speaks in and through the words and gestures of people'. The visible, the tangible, the finite, and the historical – all these are actual or potential carriers of the divine presence. It is only in and through these material realities that we can encounter the invisible God. Catholicism insists that the dichotomy between nature and grace is eliminated. Human existence is already graced existence. There is no merely natural end of human existence, with a supernatural end imposed from above. Human existence in its natural, historical condition is radically oriented toward God. This history of the world is, at the same time, the history of salvation.

Grace and nature are inseparable. There is an original unity and intimacy between the experience of self and the experience of God to the extent that the history of one becomes the history of the other. It is clear from the gospel that in the love of neighbour one has already discovered God. Our human experience is the medium through which revelation takes place. That is why it is in the unfolding of our lives that the eternal plan of God is revealed in each one of us. Through the gift of grace, people are immersed in God's presence, inspired by God's love, and filled with a sense of their common destiny. In this union with Christ they are fulfilled by God alone. There cannot be two parallel lives in our existence – on the one hand the so-called spiritual life and on the other, the so-called secular life.

Jesus, the sacrament of God, was so thoroughly and utterly human that he scandalised his neighbours more than once. John the Baptist came fasting and they said he was possessed. Jesus came eating and drinking and they called him a glutton and a drunkard. He showed his anger, his deep desire, his need of male and female company, his frustration and his impatience – ‘Get behind me Satan,’ and ‘How long have I been with you and yet, you have learned so little!’ This is the humanity that has opened heaven to us (Heb 5:1-10). In his finite condition, Jesus took on the three great sufferings of physical pain, a loss of his good name, and a sense of ultimate abandonment by his father. He also laughed, cried, rejoiced, befriended, loved, was tempted, was intimate, celebrated, needed to rest, enjoyed eating and drinking. He confronted evil, and above all, confronted the dark night of his own soul. He was betrayed by one he deeply loved. He grew in wisdom and age and grace.

Scriptural study and doctrinal explanations, when considered on their own, isolated or ‘neat’ so to speak, are usually cerebral rather than emotive and inspiring. But when the ‘cognitive content’ is applied to our emotions, drives and needs, then the whole enterprise takes on a different and deeper meaning. The focus shifts to the implications of Revelation (scripture and tradition) for our very lives – our experiences, the quality of our life-choices, our search for inner fulfilment.

We place our own stories in the context of the greater Story so that a new, current story is told. We need a process: first to reflect on what we have seen, done, learnt, suffered and enjoyed. We express how we have reacted to those experiences, the meaning we gave to them, the emotions we felt. Then there is the reviewing and consideration of this exercise in the light of Christian revelation about the deeper personal and universal significance of all life’s experiences. Such sharing contributes to self-knowledge, self-transcendence, personal freedom and true human growth.

There are those who insist on the importance of content, and those who champion process and experience. Both approaches are necessary but the approaches are not equal. The deeper and more abiding is the winning over of the heart. Necessary and appropriate as it may be, unless knowledge alone is transcended, the person of Jesus will not capture our imagination or our heart. We must allow our hearts to catch fire. The heart needs caring for. Without care and attention it goes out of kilter; it cannot cope because it cannot express itself. The mind takes over and rules the show. Without an animating heart, the intellect appears superior, and we give too much attention and value to it.

The ‘mindful heart’ will see and hear the heartbeat of God in all the heartbeats that fill and lift the world every day. Our movement is from life to revelation and back again so as to transform our lives. That is the vital vision that changes everything and resets the compass to true North. We begin with the heart which ensures that Christ is, indeed, always cherished at the centre of our Team Life. The real content of our endeavours Scripture and Study is not only a mastery of the knowledge, facts and information about the faith, in themselves – it is about how they reveal God’s secret about the love and meaning in each of our life-experiences, and in the world itself. What is hoped for is a profound transformation of mind and heart by nourishing the depths of the human person in everything that we are. When Christ is at the centre, head and heart combine in the total transformation of the human person. But love will always come before knowledge.