

*SÍNODO*

# The Word of God in the Church

*Aportes desde América Latina*

## Are there errors in the Bible?

The Council Vatican II says: “The Sacred books teach compactly, faithfully and without error the Truth that God made consign in these books for our salvation” (DV 11; CCC 107). After understanding the goal of the Bible, we can approach this topic with clarity. We know God, with the Bible, didn’t seek to teach us mathematics, astronomy, medicine or any type of determinate culture, but the science of salvation, it means to reveal us his project of love and the way to carry out it, in our concrete history.

All that is in the Bible is there as sure way, as “canon” that, following it, takes us, certainty, to the salvation. It can be the pessimism of the Ecclesiastes, the moral of certain passages of the Ecclesiastic or the pietism of Tobias. Everything is part of that very human way that takes to Christ, and it can become stone in the construction of the future. It is not a rectilinear road. The reality of the life is tortuous, but it takes to Christ. The Bible teaches the human and divine road ?because it is wanted for everlasting God, full problems, very realistic and it takes to Risen Christ.

We can compare the Bible with a great map of highways. The important thing is that in it the highways are well- traced, so that they serve us as guide to arrive to the wanted place. The important thing is that the map fulfills its objective. But, anybody mains the colors adopted by the authors of the map to point out seriously, for example, the rivers in blue, the low regions in green and the highways in red or in black, according to their importance. Neither t interest too much the quality of the elected paper. Everything is only a way to communicate the message of the map. The important thing is to know how to interpret their signs and layouts rightly, so that they can behave with success. It would be a serious error to want to interpret the map like a picture or as a reading book.

## CONTENIDO

- Are there errors in the Bible? ..... 3
- The literary genres in the Bible ..... 4
- Difficulties in the reading of the Bible ..... 7
- Misunderstanding when reading the Bible ..... 11
- The believers and the Bible ..... 13
- How to read the Bible? ..... 17
- Biblical pastoral ..... 21
- The Lectio Divina ..... 22

In the same sense, the Bible is true, she doesn't make a mistake, neither she lies in what she narrates regarding the way people follows in order to get to Christ, and regarding the message that gives us in relation to the "spiritual" dimension of our existence. The important thing is to have the proper look regarding the goal of the Bible, just to understand the meaning of its signs and not to be deceived.

The Bible inspires the life, in the sense of becoming aware of the God's call that today speaks us. The Bible takes to God! In this sense, she is norm, because she herself is fruit of the divine inspiration: she comes from God. The rest ? for example the literary gender, the style used by the author, their universe point of view, etc.— are forms to reach to this end. And those forms, of course, participate of the weaknesses and human imperfections of those who were instruments to communicate the revealed Truths. Concretely, the scientific or popular knowledge about the natural reality are proper of each time and place in where the books of the Holy Scriptures were written.

## The literary genres in the Bible

*"To discover the author's intention, it is necessary to keep in mind, among other things, the literary genres. Due to the truth is presented and it is enunciated in a diverse way in works of diverse historical nature, in prophetic books or in other literary genres. The interpreter will investigate what the sacred author says and he tries to say, according to his time and culture, by means of the literary genres, characteristic of his time. To understand exactly what the author proposes in his writings, it is necessary to take in very account the ways of thinking, of being expressed and of narrating that were used in the writer's times, and also the expressions that were more used in ordinary conversation"* (DV 12; Cf. CCC 109).

The Bible is an entire arsenal of genres and literary forms. In the last centuries people didn't know how to appreciate the wealth and the

coloring in the literary forms of the Bible. It was not spoken but of three genres: the historical books, the prophetic ones and the didactic ones.

This superficial and mechanic allowance made that Tobias was put among the historical books, Jonas between the prophetic ones, and the Psalms among the didactic ones. And the worst thing, the calls historical books monopolized the attention, so that the whole Bible many times was trapped and reduced to "sacred history".

In fact, each book has its literary gender, and inside each one it usually has diverse literary forms. The modern exegesis distinguishes in the Bible the historical chronicle, the saga, the myth, the story, the fable, the sermon, the exhortation, the confession of faith, the didactic narration, the parable, the prophetic sentence –legal or wise, the proverb, the speech, the prayer, the song, etc.

Also, in the Bible, like all writing, sometimes it is spoken in figured language: it says, for example, that the moon is embarrassed and that the stars are happy; that God sleeps and gets up; that He covers to the faithful one with their wings... It would be mistaken to understand it like it sounds or to imagine that the sky has doors with Saint Peter as a porter, because the Lord said that he was giving him the keys. The figures must be take like figures and not as reality just as they sound.

Also, it would be mistaken to take, like it sound, the frequent exaggerations of the Bible. In that time, everybody understood that it was necessary to increase the number, when they were spoken of the combatants in a battle or they were spoken of the wealth of the temple or the king. The exaggeration was a way of to enhance the story and to insinuate the importance of the thing. Today, we also exaggerate with that objective. They are also figures that should not take literally: paradoxes like the one who "doesn't leave to a side his father or his mother... and even his own person, cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14,26).

The authors of the Bible, son of their time, expressed their ideas according to the mentality and the science of their time. For that reason they say that the earth is fixed and the sun is the one that moves, or that the moon is bigger than the stars. In conformity with the religious vision and the science of their time, they attribute many illnesses to the demon. Frequently the second causes are jumped, attributing to God directly what is happening.

In the Bible, sometimes there are folkloric narrations, with their typical exaggerations and popular epic forms, whose object is to give importance to the figure of the heroes and the people's feats. Such appear to be the history of Samson (Cf. Jg 13), the skins that Rebecca put to Jacob (Cf. Gn 27) or the form that plagues of Egypt are described (Cf. Ex 9). Those forms are ways of the popular narrative that delights in giving colorful to the stories and to enlarge the things to impress of the listener.

Sometimes, in the Bible there are cabals, it means, lessons in numbers, thing very of the pleasure of the oriental, although for us it is something unknown. A clear example of that is the age of the patriarchs. With those numbers so high it is not wanted to determine a concrete number of lived years, but possibly to give us a lesson in numbers on the perfection of the patriarchs. We cannot take numbers of the Bible as they sound to us. It is necessary to look for their symbolic sense, since frequently they mean quality and non quantity.

Other examples of the symbolic use of the numbers are: the "seven" mean fullness, an all finish, perfect and lover for everlasting God. When Jesus spoke to his Apostles that it is necessary to forgive seventy times seven (Cf. Mt 18, 22), he indicates them that it is necessary to always forgive, every time.

"Forty" mean a lot, a long period. In this way Bible said that in the flood it rained during forty days and their nights (Cf. Gn 7, 12); it

means that rained a lot of time without stopping. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, that is to say that a long period of fast happened (Cf. Mt 4, 2). The "twelve" mean the number that identifies the community founded by God. Twelve were the tribes of Israel, twelve the Apostles. The "six" symbolize the imperfection. The 666 are the number of the beast (Cf. Ap 13, 18).

As it can be appreciated, Hebrews participated from the oriental culture that was fond to give meaning to the numbers. In some books of the Bible this tendency is very clear, for example in the Apocalypse.

## **Difficulties in the reading of the Bible**

The believers have several problems when facing with the Bible. Let us see some of these difficulties:

### **The Bible is sword of two edges**

What will be the reason that in some places, the use of the Bible make that people wake up to a renovation, but in other places, however, it produces a counter-effect? It is not enough to say: "We will disclose the Bible, and the force of the Word will make, alone, the rest". When the people catch the Bible in their hands, a strange and almost uncontrollable phenomenon is given: or they reborn and begin to feel liberate or they remain prisoners of the letters of the Bible, inside an extremely conservative Bible itself, characteristic presents in the fundamentalist sects, and sometimes also in some Catholic groups.

The Bible, just as it is read, or helps or runs over; she liberates or she oppress. She is not neuter. She is like a sword of two edges: it always cuts, for well or for bad. The text is identical for everybody, but the result is not the same in its reading. The Bible is "sword of double edge. It penetrates until the root of the soul and of the spirit, sounding the bones and

the articulations to prove the desires and the most intimate thoughts” (Heb 4, 12). She shows us what the light’s quality inside each one is.

Any time that people reborn, they begin to understand the truth involves in Paul’s sentence: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the freedom is” (2Cor 3, 17). But, when people loses force and walk prisoner in the meshes of the Bible, they misinterpret the Word. In this case, it is necessary to reach the same Paul’s conclusion: “They have a veil on the eyes” (Cf. 2Cor 3, 13.15) and, for this reason, they don’t understand the destination of their life and of the history.

### **Defeated for the letter of the Bible**

Sometimes, when people meet to meditate on the Bible, only discuss the letter, and it ends in a close and lost people. They fall in a kind of literalism that mystifies and deifies the literal letters of the Scriptures. It kills the spirit, the common sense and the creativity. They are defeated by the letter of the Bible, but they are not convinced by their message. They become slaves of the Bible, oppressed by her; and the Word of God does contribute any liberation.

In some places, mainly, where the Catholics have to cohabit with certain evangelical groups and with Mormons and Witness of Jehovah, the confusion around the letter arrive until the last ends. They accuse us of not observing the Bible for the fact of drinking alcohol or to dance or to eat pig meat and blood or not to observe Saturday days. Certainly the letter of the Bible affirms those things. The Catholics, many times, don’t know how to respond, and in this moment begins the confusion and the anguish. Although, in certain cases, the common sense tells them that those summations cannot be God’s Will, just as it is interpret by the evangelical groups.

It is necessary to develop a convenient pedagogy to help people to correct this narrow and faulty vision of the Bible, without destroying the immense faith that people have in the Word of God. It is necessary

to carry out serious efforts, so that the results of the modern exegesis concerning the literal sense of the Bible, will be in people’s service, and help them to be liberated of this almost suffocating vision of the letter of the Bible that besieges him everywhere.

### **Subjectivism in the interpretation**

On one hand there are the not controlled explosions of the Pentecostalism, that explode in all the corners; on the other hand there are the resurgence of the charismatic movements that appeal more to the religious feeling of the people, than the critical reason; they, sometimes, ignore all norm and authority, appealing to the freedom of the Spirit.

The same Word of God puts us in guard against all subjectivist interpretation: “Know it well: nobody can interpret for itself a prophecy of the Scripture, since no prophecy comes from a human decision, but rather the men of God spoke, moved by the Sacred Spirit” (2Pe 1, 20-21).

The supreme reason against the subjectivist is that what has a divine origin cannot be at the mercy of the human interpretation, that easily becomes capricious or manipulator, according to its interests.

But, the biblical interpretation of the Christian communities is also in continuous danger of subjectivism, because, with a lot of frequency, it lacks help of the interpretation exegetic. The popular interpretation and the exegetic interpretation should be as the two rails that lead the train to their destination; but when the two rails separate, the train could derails and no longer walk. In order to unite them, the Spirit attended the Shepherds, Teachers of the Church, to whom He commended its Word.

## **The problem of the language**

The problem of the language is much more serious of what we think. The language can be a means of communication or a communication switch in off. The Words are as the plants that grow after having sprung from the seed that was sowed in the land. But there are lands that don't produce coffee, although we sow in them tons of seeds of coffee. Likewise, certain language type, no matter how much we plant it in the people, doesn't take place; in their land, this seed type doesn't germinate.

It is necessary a long coexistence with the people to be able to know their human land; only in this way we can know if the seed of our language can produce fruit in her. Jesus cohabited thirty years in Nazareth, just to speak only three. And three years were enough to die...

It is urgent to listen and to try to capture the form of expression of the people, how they verbalize the matters of the faith. We will probably rediscover in a new way the old things that we believed to already know. It results in one important conclusion: the "ignorant" were not so much and the "sages" neither. The biblical interpretation is not a highway with unique sense that runs from the pastoral agents toward the people. It is a highway with double sense. If the double way doesn't exist, it is sign that something very serious is failing.

The peasant, the indigenous and people in general are intuitive, concrete and colorist. In their land does nor germinate the abstract ideas, deduced, ones and other, by way of syllogisms. They think of concentric circles, starting from basic intuitive nuclei; they get lost in deductive ideological reasons, made by way of chain in which cannot get lost any intermediate link. In this way, the Bible, in fact, entirety is written according to the mechanism of the popular thought. They are the "intellectuals" those that complicate their understanding. It is very urgent that the numbers of exegetes increase, so they can unite biblical science and popular wisdom.

Also, they must offer translations of the Bible that are faithful to the language of the simple and humble people. Only in this way, we can be faithful to the original style of the Bible. It is painful to verify that there are explanations of the Bible that are good just to increase complexes of ignorance and dependence in the middle of the people.

## **Misunderstanding when reading the Bible**

### **When lacks the knowledge of the reality**

To interpret the Bible without looking at the reality of the life is like to have the salt outside the food, or the seed outside of the earth, or the light under the table; it is as cluster without trunk, eyes without head, river without borders, guitar without guitarist.

Whoever reads and studies the Bible, but doesn't look at the reality of the people, neither fights for the justice demanded by the fraternity, is not faithful to the Word of God and doesn't imitate Jesus Christ. He or she is similar to the Pharisees that knew the Bible by memory, but didn't practice it. When the people read the Bible in a closed atmosphere, that doesn't allow entering the sun of the reality, they fall in the danger of an alienating and spiritualist interpretation.

Some people are locked in the narrow limits of their group, entering in a dead end because only want to transform the life of their own group, without lifting the look beyond those limits, toward a bigger human community. A community of this type is not dangerous for the anti-evangelical system that governs the world and the life of the people. It can even favor and to confirm it! In fact, such people don't end up implanting the Gospel in the trunk of the human life, but, at most, in the tip of an outlying spray.

When the exegete studies the Bible with a serious knowledge of the text, but without knowing the reality of the life of today's people, the

danger is to explain the Bible according with the system that, today, oppresses the people through the knowledge, the power and the having.

### **When lacks the community experience of the faith**

The context of the life is not another thing, according to Saint Paul that the “letter of Christ... not written with ink, but with the Spirit of everlasting God” (2Cor 3, 3). Without this living letter, it cannot have light to illuminate the written letter and to discover the sense it keeps for us. Without the living context, the letters is more than enough. For the interpretation of the Bible it is essential the looking of faith born of the Spirit, the inspiring one of the text. Without the atmosphere of faith, they are only two dry sticks, without life: the reality and the text.

When lacks the context of the community faith, it gets lost the sensibility to capture the presence and the message of God. Everything is reduced to the microscopic size of our own projects with regard to the reality. From this myopia is born the ideological and tendentious use of the Bible: it decreases their sense to the size of our own thoughts.

All those who are seeking to change the reality, but without paying the enough attention to the formation of the community of faith, at the last are disabling the transformation of the reality. The community is not a mere instrument; it is also the anticipation of the final party, when the resurrection will be present in the life.

The community of communities –that is the Church, is the one that, by the light of the faith in Christ, its head, gives the righteous approach of the biblical interpretation. If lacks this ecclesiastic sensibility, easily each person or each group make the text says what they need him to say, for their own program. The ecclesiastic sensibility open to the Universal Community, visibly served by the Pope: in her they stand out and complete the interpretations of the local communities.

## **The believers and the Bible**

### **The Christian people rediscovers the Bible**

Just before the Council Vatican II, the Bible was almost exclusively the book of the priests and the studious exegetes, technicians in biblical matters. Since the Council, the refund began from the Bible to the people. In his wonderful dogmatic “Constitution on the Divine Revelation”, it is said that “the faithful ones must have easy access to the Sacred Writing...; the Word of God has to be available in all the ages” (DV 22).

At the beginning, the Bible was located in the past, that is to say, only in the historical and literary context in that he/she was born. With it, the Bible was made an “old” book. But once setting the Bible in hands of the believing people, this soon begins to see not only the narrative of a history of the past, but the mirror of their own today’ history. And, looking at the mirror of the Bible, the people are discovering its own human being and its mission into the world: their identity of People of God. When discovering in the Bible the mirror of their life, the people of the communities gets that the Bible ends up occupying the place that she always wanted to have in the life and in the history. The “Letter of God” arrives at the addressee’s house. The Bible is located this way under good conditions to produce abundant fruits.

But, the Christian people have not only rediscovered the Bible. Now, they look at her like something own, as “their” book, the book of the People of God, “written for us.” In this sense, is born a new and different vision of the same Bible and of the life, in whose center appears the person of Christ, alive and lived; also appear the faith in the action of the Holy Spirit. It is a very “old” vision that is waking up now in the people; but that makes of the Bible a “new” and current book, motor of the whole renovation process.

## **To read the Bible in the life**

According to this vision, Bible and life are united. When the people of the communities open the Bible wants to find in her the things of the life, and in the life he wants to find the things of the Bible. Spontaneously they use the Bible like an image, a symbol, a mirror, in which, the people looks what is happening today.

The main objective of the reading of the Bible made in the communities is not to interpret the Bible itself, but interpreting the life with the help of the Bible. It is not to know what happened to the other ones, but to know, mainly, what God is requesting to them. The Bible is read and studied to be able to know the present reality and the call of God that is hiding in her. Once discovered the Bible, the life forms a duet with her, harmonizing in the most average facts. The Bible helps to understand the reality better, and the reality helps to understand the sense of the Bible better: now is already possible to point out the two things.

The communities believe firmly that God speaks to them directly through the Bible. It is not as like a letter written to other people. They feel that everything has been written for them; they feel the Word of God like a current presence, as something “domestic” and their own. That is the reason of their gratitude, respect and interior freedom in front of the Bible. People are grateful of the Word of God due to, so many times, besides children it is the only wealth they possess in their poverty.

The concern of reading the Bible in the life no always is something explicit. It is as the budget of the whole use that the people make of the Bible. It is as the root of where everything is born. Such an attitude would have to live every Christian.

## **With the light of faith in the eyes**

For the believing people, the reading of the Bible is the exercise of its own faith. When the communities meet to read the Word of God, they generally wrap up the reading in prayer. They make prayer reading.

In the bottom, the faith of the people in the Bible is not to have faith in a book, but having faith in Somebody that speaks to us through the book. What gives sense and life to the book is, in fact, the faith in Christ, in the life and in the organized Christian community, salvation instrument.

This light cannot fade, because if it ends up, the text of the Bible will turn off, and the written Word is no longer for anything. That is the clue to understand the necessity to feed this light continually.

This light is not the privilege of some experts or some more learned people. It is a gift of God granted, above all, to the community and, through the community, to the individuals that belong to her. For that reason it is so convenient the community context for the reading of the Bible. The individual reading is not even, neither can it be, a purely private question: it should strengthen and to feed the commitment with God and with the brothers and sisters. The Bible was given to the People of God, today the Church, guided by Pedro's successor and its brothers, the Bishops.

So, is necessary to read the Bible in prayer's atmosphere and, to be possible, in atmosphere of community prayer. The Holy Spirit clarifies his meaning and also reveals what the Lord is speaking through diversity realities. The Bible must be read with the help of yesterday's community and today's community, united by the Apostles and its successors (TRADITION AND MAGISTERIUM).

In the Bible is necessary to look for the spiritual “sense”, of which already spoke the Holy Fathers, at the beginning of the Christianity.

Spiritual sense doesn't mean a compassionate or fantastic sense, fruit of the caprice of each one. It is the sense given by the Spirit to their Church. Who lives in the Church, lives in contact with Christ, alive, risen, and from him we receive the gift of the Spirit that removes us the veil of the eyes to reveal us the sense that he wants to offer to their people through the Bible. "The man stayed in the human thing, doesn't understand the things of the Spirit. For him they are madness and cannot understand them, because they are appreciated starting from a spiritual experience" (1Cor 2,14) and, consequently, he cannot discover the spiritual sense.

### **Like a transformer force**

The people of the communities take the Word of God seriously. They don't read only to understand, but rather he also tries to practice the Word. Their reading is not only "informative": they go to the practice, to the action, to the transformation of people and of the society. The reading that makes of the Bible, very concretely, reveals the "announcement" and the "accusation" that take to the "conversion".

People look for in the Bible a sense to live. And they find it. With the certainty that is the God himself, the one who speak. For that reason, sometimes they have the courage of to suffer and to fight to defend this sense that they discovered for their lives. His encourage is feeding at the source of the Word of God. The concrete practice gives new life to the written reading, and the reading of the same written letter of the Bible encourages him, and guides him in its fight for the liberation of its brothers and sisters.

This way of interpreting the Bible restores to the "inspiration" its true sense: it is, mainly, a book of authority, inspired by God, that demands obedience; but also is a book that brings us the inspiration of God for our life; that brings us their force to guide and to transform the existence.

## **How to read the Bible?**

*"The Church «recommends insistently to all the faithful ones... the assiduous reading of the Scriptures so that they acquire 'Jesus Christ supreme science' (Flp 3, 8), 'because to ignore the Scriptures is to ignore Christ' (S. Geronimo) » (DV 25)" (CCC 133). We have to read the Bible, as Word of God, "with the same Spirit it was written" (DV 12). For this, it is necessary to take into account the approaches characteristic of the Christian faith (Cf. CCC 115).*

### **Approaches of the faith**

- *To attend the content and the unit of the whole Scripture.* It is important to have a global vision of the whole Bible: this complete vision enlarges the sense of a text and it helps to locate it inside its context (cultural, literary and historical), it gives light to illuminate the different parts and details, and it impedes to give absolute priority to certain texts in detriment of others. However, in accordance with the circumstances and the problems, it is normal that it is privileged one or another text, book or Testament. For example, the Vatican II privileged the New Testament and, inside him, it privileged Saint Paul's Letters; in our communities, today we privilege the book of Exodus, the Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse (Cf. CCC 112, 128, 129).

- *To take into account the alive tradition of the whole Church.* The Tradition wraps the Bible before, during and after. Before being written, the Bible was narrated. Later on, it was written slowly, inside a process of transmission of the histories and doctrines, customs and traditions of the people. Finally, once written, it continued being transmitted, of generation in generation, until today, in the interior of a living tradition. Taking into account the Tradition helps us to discover how the experience of the same faith, in different situations, generated stories different from the same events (for example the Exodus) and to understand how, today, the same faith can be embodied and lived in the so different situations that our communities are living (Cf. CCC 113).

- *To take into account the analogy of the faith.* The text should be read not only inside the whole of the Bible, neither only inside the context of the Tradition, but also inside the current situation of the Church. It should not only obey the demands of yesterday's faith, but also to the demands of today's faith and the everyday faith. It is what we call "analogy of the faith" (Cf. CCC 114).

### **Approaches of the reality**

Besides the characteristic approaches of the Christian faith, it is necessary to take into account the approaches of the reality, to be able to read the Bible "with the same Spirit that it was written" (DV 12). So, it is necessary:

- To take into account the reality of the people to whom the text was written. It means to know the situation and the culture of the writer time, and to discover the circumstances that motivate him to write. All this, to be able to end up discovering the exactly sense of the text (Cf. DV 12).

With the help of the sciences (history, ethnology, literary critic and social sciences, etc.), we can establish the "sense itself" of the text, and we qualify ourselves to discover the "sense that it has for us". In our Bible we find these results on the footnotes.

Locating the text in the concrete and conflicting context of its origin, we overcome the "fundamentalism" that has been impelled for the religious sects, and that causes so much damage in the faith of our people.

- To take into account the reality of the people who read the text today. The Bible was born of the concern to rediscover, in the conflicting reality of each time, the call of the everlasting God. Jesus himself explained the Bible starting from the current problem of the disciples of Emmaus (Cf. Lk 24,13-35), due to it was the culminating fact of the whole history: the death and resurrection of Christ.

According the Pope Paulo VI, it is necessary to put the biblical text "in relation to the contemporary person": the fidelity to the modern man, although arduous and difficult, is necessary, if we want to remain entirely faithful to the message. Here, in Latin America, it means fidelity to the poor: for this reason, the option for them, defined in Puebla and ratified in Santo Domingo, is the starting point, from where we should read and interpret the Bible to everybody, poor and rich, without excluding somebody.

The reading of the Bible from the point of view of the poor, for itself, is, in any way, "reductionist". Overcoming the risk of being "spiritualistic" and "alienating", she illuminates the concrete situations of the life of the people and one again she is genuinely Good News for the poor, also open to anyone who is reading to follow Jesus, in solidarity with the poor.

### **Prayer Reading**

To read the Bible in the same Spirit it was written, it is not enough to use the approaches of the faith and of the reality. It is necessary to create an atmosphere where the Holy Spirit can act freely and also can reveal the sense the old text makes for us today, here in Latin America, in Ecuador, for example.

This means:

- To create an atmosphere of listening and silence;
- To have a constant concern to deepen the life of the people, to share the happiness, sadness and hopes of the poor;
- To wrap everything in the prayer;
- To dedicate time not only to the celebration, bus to the study;
- To ensure that the study finishes in sharing, in prayer and in concrete commitment;
- To give importance to the Liturgy, to the Sacraments, to the Liturgy of the Hours and to many forms of pity with people celebrates its faith;

- To know how to celebrate the Word as Sacrament of Risen Christ, in the community (Cf. CCC 111).

A word is not only worth just for the idea that transmits, but also for the force that communicates: it doesn't only say, but also do! The Word of God is light, it straight: the Hebraic term "*dabar*", as we said before, means, at the same time, "word and thing": says and makes, announces and attracts, illuminates and strengthens Word and Spirit. In the Church' history this kind of reading received the name of "Lectio Divina" (Divine Reading) (Cf. CCC 1177).

### **In the service of the evangelism**

Finally, our reading of the Bible, if want to be authentic, it has to be in the service of the mission of the Church: to evangelize in order to transform this world in the perspective of building the Kingdom of God.

This demands us:

- To have present, in the reading of the Bible, the reality of people to which we have to evangelize;
- To allow the Word of God to transforms us, in personal way and in community, so to be able to be witnesses of what we announce.

For that, all our life should be fed and enlighten for the Word of God, to such a point that she arrives to "illuminate the mind, to strengthen the will and to inflame the heart" (DV 23).

## **Biblical pastoral**

For the baptism, we the believers unite sacramentally to the call and the shipment, to the discipleship and Jesus' mission.

Our mission is to look for roads of life in groups and in cultures that walk to our side, strengthened with the force of the Holy Spirit and based in the Word of God (Cf. ZENIT, XVI Benedicto, 15-01-07).

To educate the people into de Word of God we have to base the Christian commitment and all our life in the rock of the Word (Benedicto XVI, Speech in Aparecida 2007).

All the pastorals in the Church should be based and lively with the Word of God, overcoming to reduce the biblical work to some realized activities from a specific pastoral, next to other pastorals.

The personal and community reading of the Bible has taken to the centrality of the Word in the life and in the mission of the Latin American and Caribbean Church, feeding our discipleship and mission, and arriving to the biblical animation of all the pastorals.

The proximity with the Word of God has produced the following fruits:

- Transformation and spiritual growth at personal and community level.
- The biblical interest of the pastorals developed new formation centers, in which the Bible occupies a preferential place.
- The catechesis got rich and it based in the rock of the Word of God.
- The national biblical campaigns: the month of the Bible together with the participation of all the pastorals.

- The biblical subsidies that facilitate the participation of the faithful ones in the liturgy, the sacraments and the life of the faithful ones.
- Biblical deepening in the practices of the popular religiosity.
- Animation and biblical formation together with the pastorals: childhood, young, women, indigenous, afro-centric, families, movements and social pastoral.
- Prayer and meditation with the practice of the *Lectio Divina* that feeds the life and the Christian commitment of solidarity.
- The Word of God opens ecumenical spaces in favor of the unit and in defense of the life.
- The biblical formation offers wide diversity of materials and visual means; also the use of Internet.

## The Lectio Divina

Jesus spent nights in prayer, meditating the Writing. He could say: “The Lord granted me the gift of speaking as its disciple, so that I know how to take a word of comfort to who is discouraged. Every morning He wakes up me, awake my hearing, so that I listen to him as a disciple” (Is 50, 4). This is the sense and the objective of the daily Lectio Divina.

### 1. “Make you in me according to your Word!”

When beginning the Lectio Divina, you will read the Bible to listen what God has to tell you, to know his Will and to live Jesus Christ’s Gospel better. In you should prevail the poverty and the disposition that the old Helí recommended Samuel: “*Speaks Lord that your servant listens*” (1Sm 3, 10). You should have Mary’s same obedient attitude: “*Make you in me according to your Word*” (Lk 1, 38).

### 2. To request to the Holy Spirit: “Ask for it and you will receive!”

The starting point of the Lectio Divina should be the humility. To be able to listen the Word of God it is necessary that you get ready, watching over in the prayer, asking Him to send his Spirit. Without the help of the Spirit of God, it is not possible to discover the sense that the Word of God makes for us today (Cf. Jh 14, 26; 16, 13; Lk 11, 13).

### 3. To create a withdrawal and listening atmosphere

To read the Bible is like to frequenting a friend. Both demand the maximum of attention, respect, friendship, surrenders and attentive listens. For it, you should learn how to cultivate the silence inside you, during the time of the Prayer Reading. And remember: a good and worthy position of the body favors the withdrawal of the mind.

### 4. To receive the Bible like the Book of the Church and of the Tradition

Opening the Bible you should be very aware that a book that is opening up is not yours, but of the community, of the Church. Making the Lectio Divina, you are entering in the great river of the Tradition of the Church that crosses the centuries. While you are making you Prayer Reading of the Bible, you are not alone, but rather you are together to the brothers and the sisters of the so many communities and churches that, before you, offer “to meditate day and night in the law of the Lord” (Ps 1,3). They are many! They have been many and many that didn’t know how to read the written text, but they knew how to read the text of the life in the face of their brothers and sisters.

### 5. To have a correct attitude in front of the Bible

To make the Lectio Divina is like to ascend a stairway of four tiers that takes us until God: Reading, Meditation and Sentence finish in a

fourth step that is the Contemplation.

1° STEP: **Reading.** Before anything, you should have the concern to investigate: “*What does the text say itself?*” This demands silence. Inside you all have to be silenced, so that anything prevents you to listen what the text means to you, otherwise you will force the text to tell you only that you would like to hear.

2° STEP: **Meditation.** You also will be worry to ask: “*What does the text tell me and to us?*” In this second step you do enter in dialogue with the text so that the sense is upgraded and do penetrate in your life. To make as Mary that meditated that what she listened (Lk 2, 19. 51). This is the only way to discover that “the Word of God is very near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you put it into practice” (Dt 30, 14).

3° STEP: **Prayer.** Altogether to what we have said, you should always worry in discovering: “*What does the text make me say to God?*” is the hour of the honors, the moment of watching over in prayer. Up to now, God spoke you; it is the time to respond him.

4° STEP: **Contemplation.** Contemplate is to savor, right now, a piece of God’s love that overcomes all the things; it is to begin seeing the world and the life with the eyes of the poor, with the eyes of God; it is to assume your own poverty and to eliminate your own powerful thoughts; it is to take conscience that many things that you thought that were fidelity to the Gospel, in fact they were not more than fidelity to yours own interests and ideas; it is to show with your life that the love of God is revealed in the love to the neighbor; it is to say always “that is made in me according to your Word” (Lk 1,38).

## 6. To become under the trial of the Word of God

The Lectio Divina is a strong moment of confrontation between the Will of God and the own aspirations. To meditate the Word of God

is to make what the prodigal son made when he was far from the Father’s house: to take account and to confronted with the life in the Father’s House and with the Word of God; to resolve a change of idea and of life, for more painful than that it is; to stand up and to decide to return to the Father, to be with his brothers and sisters.

## 7. To try by all possible means that the interpretation will be faithful

Looking for that the Lectio Divina won’t remain in mere summations of my own feelings and thoughts, but rather that it will get a bigger stability, it is important to keep in mind three fundamental demands:

1<sup>a</sup> DEMAND: **To confront with the faith of the Church.** Always to confront the result of your reading with the community to which you belong, with the faith of the alive Church. The opposite attitude, can make that your effort doesn’t go to any place (Gal 2,2) due to it is there, in the small ecclesial community fed and sustained by the Word of God that the faith of the Church is born, as well as of a small source the river is born and it waters the earth.

2<sup>a</sup> DEMAND: **To confront with the reality.** Confront always all you read with the Bible and with the reality that we are living. When the Lectio Divina doesn’t reach its objective in our life, the cause is not always the prayer lack; it is, sometimes, the lack of attention to the faith of the Church or the lack of critical study of the text. Many times, it is simply lack of attention to the naked and raw reality that we are living. Casianus said: “Who lives in the superficiality, doesn’t reach the source of the Psalms.”

3<sup>a</sup> DEMAND: **To be confronted with the result of the exegesis.** Always confront the summations of yours reading with the results of the exegesis that investigates the sense of the Letter. The Lectio Divina have to get the sense of the Spirit (2Cor 3,6). For that reason,

to want to establish the sense of the Spirit, without basing it in the Letter, it is the same thing that to build a castle in the air, like Saint Augustine told. It is to fall in the deceit of the fundamentalism.

### **8. To imitate Saint Paul's example**

The apostle Paul was a good interpreter of the sacred Writing. He tried to have present Jesus Christ's faith, because just as he says it, only for the conversion to Jesus is that the veil falls and the Writing reveals us its sense (2Co 3, 16) and it communicates us the wisdom that takes to the salvation (2Tm 3, 15). Paul spoke of crucified Jesus (2Co 2, 2), scandal for somebody and madness for others, but for us expression of the wisdom of God (1Co 1, 23-24). It was the faith in Jesus the one that opened him the eyes to perceive the alive Word amid the poor of the periphery of Corinth, where the madness and the scandal of the cross were confusing the sages and the powerful ones of this world (1Co 1, 21-31). Paul liberated himself of the prison of the letter that kills, and he discovered the sense that Jesus' Spirit communicates us (2Co 3, 6). He interpreted the Bible starting from the problems of the people of the communities for him founded (1Co 10, 1-13) and he said that the same community was Christ's letter (2Co 3, 3). Paul was considered addressee of the Bible: "Everything was written for our instruction, for us that are living in this end of the times" (1Co 10, 11; Ro 15, 4).

### **9. To discover in the Bible the mirror of what we live today**

When making the Lectio Divina you should have very present that the text of the Bible is only a window for where you look to know that it happened with the other ones in the past; it is also a mirror, a "symbol" (Hb 11,19) where you look to know that it is passing with yourself today (1Co 10, 6-10). The daily Prayer Reading is like a rain that goes fecundating the land (Is 55, 10-11). Entering in dialogue with God and meditating his Word, you grow like a tree planted in the

river's side (Ps 1, 3). You don't see how it grows, but you perceive the result in the renovated encounter with oneself, with God and with the other ones.

### **10. To follow the three steps of the method that Jesus used with the disciples in the Emmaus' door**

The *first step*: to approach to people, to listen their reality and their problems; to be able to ask questions that help them to see the reality with a more critical look (Lk 24, 13-24). The *second step*: with the light of the Word of God to illuminate the situation that makes them to suffer and to escape from Jerusalem to Emmaus; using the Bible, to make burn the heart (Lk 24, 25-27). The *third step*: to create an praying atmosphere of faith and fraternity, where the Holy Spirit can act and opens the eyes, makes us discover Jesus' presence and it can transform the cross, sign of death, in sign of life and of hope. In this way, each thing that before created depression and blindness, now becomes strength in the walking (Lk 24, 28-32). The *result*: to infuse courage to return to Jerusalem, where continue active the forces of death that killed Jesus, and to experience the Master's alive presence and of his Spirit, in the experience of the Resurrection (Lk 24, 33-35). The *last objective* of the Lectio Divina is not to interpret the Bible, but interpreting the life. It isn't to know the content of the Sacred Book, but, helped by the written Word, to discover, to assume and to celebrate the alive Word that God speaks today in our life, in the life of the people, in the reality of the world we live (Ps 95, 7); it is to grow in the faith and to experience, more and more that "He is between us!".