

Reading Scripture & the Teaching of the Catholic Church

by Jim Seghers

In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council teaches that “the [Roman Catholic] Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures *as she venerated the Body of the Lord*... It follows that all the preaching of the Church, *as indeed the entire Christian religion*, should be *nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture*. In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the power of the Word of God that it can serve... the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life. Scripture verifies this in a most perfect way with the words: ‘The Word of God is living and active’ (Heb 4:12), and ‘is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified’” (Acts 20:32; cf. 1 Th 2:13). (Paragraph 21)

The Council further teaches that the Bible, together with Sacred Tradition, is the permanent foundation upon which sacred theology is built. (Paragraph 24) In paragraph 25, “the sacred Synod forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful,... to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8) by the frequent reading of the divine Scriptures.” Then the Council makes its own the insightful quotation from St. Jerome: “*Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.*”

In studying the word of God, the Council reminds Christians in the concluding section of this paragraph (25) “that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For [quoting the Father of the Church and great Scripture scholar, St. Jerome] ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles.’”