

Part 3 - Spiritual Reading

The volume of quality Catholic spiritual reading out there is so vast that it's almost defeating to try and make suggestions. So, again, I tried to focus on the theme of **surrender** and getting to know Jesus and God more intimately. This is just a humble selection, but I tried to cover a spectrum within that theme, hoping there is a little something for everyone. I want to note again the difference between Spiritual Reading and Prayer prompts or guides. As I mentioned, mental or contemplative prayer is a conversation WITH God, a placing of oneself in the presence of the Lord to share in intimate conversation and communion. You may use prayer prompts, such as Holy Scripture, to start your conversation and contemplation, but the bulk of your time should not be spent in just reading. (See the First Lent Resource file for ideas on Prayer guides, etc.) Spiritual Reading, on the other hand, should also be a time spent with our Lord, but, your eyes will be fixed on the page more than gazing on the heavens. The mind, intellect, heart and soul are all engaged in Spiritual reading, but it is a time of learning ABOUT God, the Church, salvation history, etc. We should all be engaged in both of these practices, so while Lent should primarily be a time of prayer and penance for sin, picking a good Spiritual Reading resource to accompany you during Lent, can help you in a well rounded spiritual practice. And, being honest, who among us knows it all? ;) Let's use that intellect that God gave us to get to know about him and move towards him. After all, as Pope Benedict the XIV said: "Love and intelligence are not in separate compartments: love is rich in intelligence and intelligence full of love."

Surrendering

1. "**Mere Christianity**" by C. S. Lewis. If you have never read this book, I highly recommend it. The reason I have it under "surrender" is that the process of conversion for Mister Lewis was an immense act of surrender and the best kind of death to self that any of us could hope for. This is a wonderful meditation on what it is to be a Christian, what we believe, and who Christ is. It is also a delightful and easy read and good for both the seasoned believer and the new convert.
2. "**Rome Sweet Home - Our Journey to Catholicism**" by Scott & Kimberly Hahn. This is another great surrender story from one of the world's, now, most famous Catholic figures. Scott Hahn and his wife Kimberly detail their difficult and often painful journey to Catholicism that has inspired thousands of people to make their own journey to the faith. I read this after my Confirmation as an adult and it was inspiring to me to see how someone so deeply convicted of his anti-Catholic standpoint could come and love the Church so much. A great reviver for the Catholic soul I think.
3. "**The Way of Prayer - A Commentary on Saint Teresa's Way of Perfection**" by Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. This is by the same author of the "*Divine Intimacy*" Carmelite prayer resource that I have mentioned so many times. If you are seeking to grow in intimacy with our Lord in your prayer life, this is a great resource. It is not dry reading at all, and it is beautifully structured around looking at the Lord's prayer (the Our Father) through the lens of Teresian spirituality. I included it in this section because one of Teresa of Avila's primary lessons was that of detachment so that you might place yourself completely in the presence of our Lord. At the heart of detachment from this world and its many distractions is a surrender to our Lord.
4. "**Rescued - The Unexpected and Extraordinary News of the Gospel**" by Fr. John Riccardo. I have not read this book yet but it is high on my reading list. Father Riccardo, as I have mentioned many times, has been so influential, challenging and inspiring in my own life. I put this under "surrender" because, until we turn our lives over to God we cannot view reality as God has created it. As Father Riccardo says, "with every fire raging in the country,

the world, and the Church, there is an urgent need to pull out of the weeds and recapture the big picture, to acquire again (or perhaps for the first time) a biblical way of seeing reality.”

5. **“Surrender! The Life Changing Power of Doing God’s Will”** by Father Larry Richards. If you listen to EWTN, you have probably heard one of Father Richards’ talks. If not, you are in for a treat. Father Richards says it like it is in no uncertain terms, but with humor and compassion. If you, (or someone in your household) have fallen into the ease of distracted pew warming, this is a great gut-punch in a good way. I think it’s clear why I put this title in this section, but as this book looks at, surrender is neither a weak or sad thing when we are surrounding to the will of God and living out our true calling as disciples or Christ and children of the Father.

Getting to Know Him

1. **“Jesus of Nazareth”** by Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). Before you skip over this one because you feel like Ratzinger is out of your realm for casual reading, please reconsider. This beautiful book is his personal search for the face of Jesus and a beautiful look at the life of our Lord. Benedict was insistent that Christianity, at its heart, is not mere a system of rules that we follow to live a certain way, but rather an encounter with a person, namely, the person of Christ. This is an intimate and deep dive into the search for who Christ was and is.
2. **“The Case for Jesus - The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ”** by Brant Pitre. While the title may sound purely academic, this is a beautiful read and full of compelling and inspiring details. It is also very useful in combatting the popular and academic arguments against the historicity and reliability of the gospels and the historical Christ. There is so much dangerously bad misinformation about Christ out there today that I think it is important both for our own personal journey with God and as evangelists (as we are all called to be), that we get a good grasp on the case for Jesus. I also highly recommend **“Jesus the Bridegroom - The Greatest Love Story Ever Told”** by Dr. Pitre. When I heard the talk that the author gave on this book, I literally wept. I don’t think you can read this book (or hear his talk) and look at Jesus the same way again. It is passionately moving and also filled with extraordinary research into tradition, Jewish custom, and more. Highly recommend anything by this author to be honest!
3. **“A Father Who Keeps His Promises - God’s Covenant Love in Scripture”** by Scott Hahn. Many of us are following the “Bible in a Year” podcast with Father Mike Schmitz this year, and this would be a great companion read. This book helps show that continuity in the story of salvation history that Jeff Cavins maps out so brilliantly in the Great Adventure Bible that Fr. Schmitz based his timeline on. It is a beautiful story, God and his covenantal love has been desiring us from the beginning and that story flows on to you and me. This is a text in which to get to know the Father more intimately as well. I have not come across a Scott Hahn book I wasn’t changed by, just look up his name and pick a title that speaks to you, you won’t regret it.
4. **“What Jesus Saw from the Cross”** by A. G. Sertillanges. I have not personally read this book yet, but I want to and it would make a powerful read as we journey towards our Lord’s Passion in Lent. Father Sertillanges lived in Jerusalem in the early 1900s and brings to life the vivid events of Christ’s passion and other parts of our Lord’s life. In the beautiful Ignation tradition of using the imagination, (but adhering to tradition and scripture,) to place one’s self in the scene of Christ’s life, Fr. Sertillanges leads us through a profound pilgrimage through the last days of Jesus’ life.
5. **“Immortal Combat - Confronting the Heart of Darkness”** by Father Dwight Longenecker. This was recommended to me by a friend recently and I think it is just what this day and

age needs. I love the description of one review: “Be forewarned: this book calls you to sanctity and is not for wimps!” For anyone looking to unite their own crosses to Christ, and take up the immortal combat with our Lord, this book will lead one through our Lord’s example to confront the evil in our lives and society at large.

As I said before this is a very small list in an ocean of amazing books. I highly recommend visiting the following sites to purchase those listed above or to find something that speaks to you personally as you prayerfully consider your Lenten reading.

The Catholic Company:

<https://www.catholiccompany.com/>

Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) Religious Catalogue:

<https://www.ewtnreligiouscatalogue.com/>

Sophia Institute Press:

<https://www.sophiainstitute.com/>

Sincerely,
- Maria MacBain