

## The Bible: Introduction (I)

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020

I would like to begin this reflection by bringing you down to a dusty desert road. It is almost two thousand years ago and a conversation is about to take place between two strangers. At the end of their meeting a life is changed for ever.

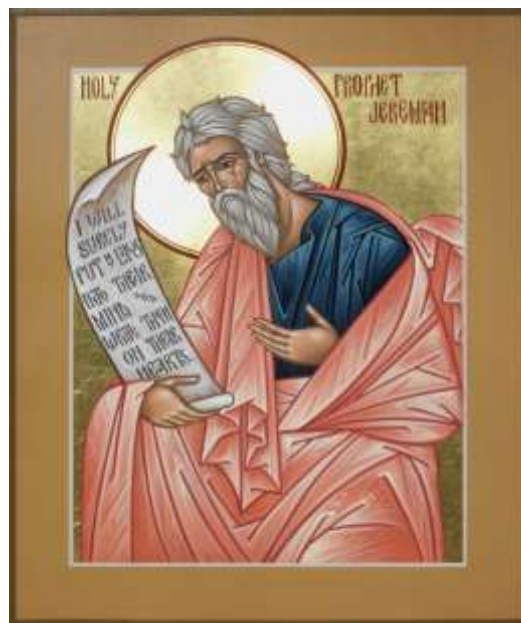
*'The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Be ready to set out at noon and go along the road that goes from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road'. So he set off on his journey. Now it happened that an Ethiopian had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; he was a eunuch and an officer at the court of the kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia; he was her chief treasurer. He was now on his way home; and as he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join that chariot.' When Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 'How can I' he replied, 'unless I have someone to guide me?' So he invited Philip to get in and sit by his side...Starting, therefore, with this text of scripture Philip proceeded to explain the Good News of Jesus to him.'* (Acts 8:26–31, 35)



The result of Philip's guidance and explaining the scriptures to the Eunuch leads to new life for the Ethiopian court official, *'...Both went down into the water and Philip baptised him.'* (Acts 8:38). I was reflecting on this episode in the Acts of the Apostles recently and it reminded me of how important our knowledge of the Bible is. Saint Jerome's saying came back to me, *'Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ!'*

As we begin to adapt to life with the Coronavirus, as we begin to learn the new language of two meter distancing, social bubbles and virus tracing apps, the only one constant and unchanging rock we have to rely on is Our Lord. To be ignorant of him, to not know the '*the Way, the Truth and the Life*' can only lead us to sadness and despondency.

As I write this reflection our churches are still not fully open and operational for Masses and liturgies however by being able to pick up our Bible, to read and to have some basic understanding of God's word, allows us to still hear and follow Him. For many people praying with the Bible is second nature but for others it can be a little daunting and an obstacle in their relationship with God. For those who aren't that confident praying with scripture I thought we might copy the example of Saint Philip and the Ethiopian court official. The Eunuch had the scriptures in front of him but needed a little guidance so that the words on the page became truly alive for him and he was able to hear God speaking.



I love these words from the prophet Jeremiah who said:

*'When your words came, I devoured them:  
your word was my delight  
and the joy of my heart;  
for I was called by your name,  
Lord God of Sabaoth.'* (Jer 15:16)

You can hear the hunger of Jeremiah as he knows earthly food can feed the body, but God's holy word is the only sustenance that can nourish the soul. Our vocation as baptised members of God's family has not been suspended because of the Coronavirus and the challenges it presents. No. Our vocation, our calling, our duty as children of God should be as active as ever and therefore we need to continue to know the Lord more and listen to where He is calling us and what His will for us is. Over the next few weeks I invite you to wander with me through the Bible and hopefully begin to have both the confidence and the hunger to listen to the voice of God speaking to you personally through Sacred Scripture. I invite you to continue to foster and nurture your relationship, through prayer, with God by devouring His Word, as the prophet phrased it. I think you will be surprised at what He says!

To begin you will need a Bible. I strongly recommend buying:



The CTS New Catholic Bible not only contains all the books of scripture we use but it has various maps and charts, helpful notes, meditations and a table of the readings used at Mass throughout the year. If you are unable to get a CTS Bible then another edition is the New Jerusalem Bible.



This translation is more or less the same as the CTS Bible. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when some Christians separated themselves from the Church and set up their own faith communities they edited the Bible and removed various texts from the scriptures. Therefore some Bible translations do not have all the books that we pray with like Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom, Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus), Maccabees and some additions to the Books of Daniel and Esther.

You can buy these Bibles online at the Catholic Truth Society's website – [www.ctsbooks.org](http://www.ctsbooks.org) or from Amazon – [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

I look forward to our scriptural wander together as we all continue to grow and know the Lord more and listen to where He is calling us to be.

God Bless and keep praying  
Happy Feast of St. Peter and St Paul.  
Fr. O'Brien