

The Bible Needs Interpretation

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

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Quoting from the Bible can seem like a sure way to get our point across. Who is going to disagree with the Bible, especially when arguing with other Christians? The Bible is the Word of God, our sacred text, and the truth of salvation. What the Bible says, goes.

Quite honestly, though, one can make the Bible say whatever one wants it to say. This is true with any document, book, or sacred text. It is so easy to pick out a few lines and use them in support our own particular agenda. This is a great injustice, for all written documents need interpretation. This is especially true of the Bible.

The Bible is a very complicated book and was not written as a single uniform work. While we do believe that all of it is inspired by the same Holy Spirit, the Bible was written over thousands of years and by dozens of authors. The Torah itself, or the first 5 books of the Bible, contains at least 4 different sources and strands of thought. There are different types of literature in it, too. Some parts of the Bible are mythical, some historical, some metaphorical, and some philosophical. Furthermore, most of St. Paul's New Testament letters were written to particular communities with particular problems and were never meant to be used as universal teachings to be imposed on all future generations. Again, as you can see, it is an injustice to use the Bible without proper interpretation.

In our Old Testament reading this weekend, we come across two interpreters of the scriptures for the people: Ezra and Nehemiah. In this reading, Ezra stood on a wooden platform as he read to the people from what was called the 'book of the law' in the Bible. As he read it, the passage says he interpreted it "so that all could understand what was read." Nehemiah, too, helped instruct the people.

In our Gospel from *Luke*, we come across another interpreter of the Bible, Jesus himself. As followers of Jesus, he is our primary interpreter. In this passage, he is interpreting a scroll from the prophet *Isaiah*. He lets the people know that he is the

fulfillment of the one who has the Spirit, who brings glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

As Ezra, Nehemiah, and Jesus suggest, we need help interpreting the Bible. Without interpreters, we can do more damage than good. As Catholics, we believe that the Church plays an important role in this. Over the past century, our church has been blest with some of the best men and women scripture scholars in our Church's history. They love God's word and God's people. We need them, for as St. Paul said in our second reading, not all have the gift of interpreting. Through the Holy Spirit leading the whole Church, we can figure out the Bible together and apply it to our present world in a way that is both inspirational and accurate.

The Bible requires interpreters so that we can truly be a Biblical people.

Just quoting the Bible isn't Christianity. Just saying we believe in the Bible doesn't make us Biblical. Jesus himself quoted from the scriptures rather infrequently. Instead, let us find interpreters who can help us understand God's word. And how will we know if it's a proper interpretation? We will know because of today's Psalm: God's words will give us 'Spirit' and 'Life.'