

Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue
31

The Importance of God's Word

By Rich Cleveland

*The written Word,
becomes the means of a
relationship with the
Living Word.*

I must confess at the outset of this article that I am prejudiced toward the Word's importance, for it was the Word of God that brought me to faith in Christ, and later that brought me to the Church. When I was a young man, I had little exposure to the Christian life; attending church only a few times a year for special occasions like Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. But at nineteen years of age, as an airman in Germany, I became interested. Consequently, I began reading the Bible the same way I read every other book; chapter one, sentence one; at Genesis 1:1. Each night I read 3–4 chapters, sometimes more, and then went to sleep saying the Rosary, which I had learned a few months earlier from a girl at Cathedral High School in Portland, Maine. I did not finish reading the Bible until months later when I had completed the final sentence of the final chapter; Revelation 22:21. However, something radically different happened to me by reading this book; about the time I was two-thirds of the way through and was reading the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, faith was formed in me and I prayed and gave my heart to Christ, and some weeks after, my faith compelled me to be baptized. Much later in life as I continued to read the Bible, I realized that a passage from Proverbs described what happened to me; "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," and so it was with me.

The next thirty-six years of my life, much of this time as a missionary with a para-church organization, I spent reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God's Word, and teaching others how to do likewise. Then at fifty-two years of age God led me to become involved with Catholicism. During a three-year period-of-time it was that same Word of God

which I had studied and meditated upon that enabled me to process through the changes in the midst of the anxiety, and pressure of becoming Catholic, while still serving within an evangelical para-church organization. The priest who mentored me explained, "Though Rich wasn't a Catholic he had a Catholic heart, and was more Catholic than many Catholics." So it was; God's Word gave me a Catholic understanding before I ever got involved with Catholicism, so that when my wife and I did choose to unite with the Church our reception into Catholicism was quite smooth theologically. Consequently, it is with thanksgiving that I can testify of being called to Christ through Scripture, formed with Catholic concepts through Scripture, and called with certainty into the Church based on Scripture.

I must also confess that I have been significantly influenced, and pleasantly overwhelmed by the historically consistent teachings of Catholic leaders regarding the importance of the Word of God. These teachings are more comprehensive, more insightful, and more imbued with passion regarding the importance of the Word, than any I had encountered previously. It would be easy here, to get diverted just quoting various leaders like St. Jerome, St. Isidore, St. Bonaventure, St. John Cardinal Newman, Hans Urs von Balthasar, St. John Paul II Pope, or a host of others, but I won't. Instead, I would like to illustrate this depth and clarity of teaching by using only Pope Benedict XVI as an example, and to introduce an important distinction he and the Synod of Bishops clarified when talking about the Word of God:

"In effect, this expression [the word of God], while referring to God's self-communication, also takes on a number

Inside this Issue

- 2 From the Heart
- 3 Emmaus Journey's Role in Parish Ministry
- 5 What does the Church say about the importance of God's Word?
- 5 Tools You Can Use

continued on page 6

From the Heart

By Ellen Arvayo

My crisis was in judging myself and not asking what God thought, not seeking His point of view.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish.”

—Philippians 2:12–15

I was reminded of this scripture passage, when I was doing some light reading about the “Last Four Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell.” This is a topic introduced to me by the roller coaster ride of 2020. I’m sure I’m not the only one who thought that the end times were very near!

“Whoa...fear and trembling...all things without grumbling or questioning.” ALL things, REALLY? Yes, that’s what it says, and boy has this challenged me lately. Called as a wife, mom, small business owner and most importantly, follower of Christ, it seems I have endless opportunities to grumble and question. Moreover, with all that has happened in our country and world these past months, most of my fear and trembling has been anchored around current events and news cycles. I really struggle with the concept of “fear”. Doesn’t Jesus himself say “do not fear,” many times in scripture? I don’t want to be afraid of losing salvation, isn’t it enough if I confess Jesus as my Lord and Savior while being nice to everyone? Whenever I come across something that seems inconsistent, I know Jesus is calling me to come closer and go deeper with him.

Taking a deep dive into holy fear has taught me some very important things and filled gaps in my understanding of what St. Paul means in this verse. Filial Fear is a term that I came across in a couple different Catholic sources and it is fear that is caused by love. We have filial fear when we are “as children” not wanting to displease or disobey our Father because of mutual love. Servile fear, which is what I was thinking fear was, is when someone fears punishment and acts to avoid punishment out of self-preservation. This last year I finally finished reading “The Diary of St. Faustina.” It was difficult for me to work through at first because St. Faustina had great fear of the Lord. So much so that I had small moments of spiritual crisis often asking myself, “How could she, who is so good, be so worried about offending God all the time and how could I, who can’t hold a candle to her, NOT be worried about offending God all the time?”

To clarify here, my moments of crisis were really my moments of conversion, my moments of moving from Servile Fear to Filial Fear. Here, St. Paul provides great help, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.” (1 Corinthians 4:3, RSV-CE) Even though St. Paul instructs us to not judge (in my case compare), I believe God was using this as a device to teach me about His Love and Mercy. My crisis was in judging myself and not asking what God thought, not seeking His point of view. When I was comparing and judging myself and not seeking God’s point of view, I could not bear it, but when I allowed God to speak into my heart laying all my sins before Him, by His grace I learned and increased in His Love. I wasn’t fearing punishment anymore, though I recognize I may deserve it, I was fearing losing our relationship which has been increasing in me daily.

This journey into understanding “fear” of the Lord, has borne much fruit in my prayer life. Out of *Servile Fear*, my prayers are characterized by checking boxes and keeping count. Out of *Filial Fear*, my prayers are intimate, connected and honest. I’m so grateful for God’s grace, that Jesus called me deeper and despite myself, He stooped down and brought me higher. I stumbled a lot because I was so afraid of fear but now, I realize that God’s great love even transforms fear.

Ellen Arvayo and her husband David work with Emmaus Journey as mentors to Emmaus Journey Young Adult Ministry (EJYAM). In this capacity they seek to develop discipleship among young adults and develop future lay leaders within the local Catholic community. They live in Gilbert, Arizona and are members of Saint Anne Roman Catholic Parish.

Emmaus Journey

MISSION:

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

VISION:

By encountering Christ through scripture, discipleship and community — individuals experience: 1) conversion to Christ; 2) transformation in Christ; and 3) mobilization for Christ, where they are actively involved in sharing their faith with others and living out their faith in the greater community. Thus achieving Goal One of the USCCB’s initiative on evangelization, “To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.”



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Emmaus Journey's Role in Parish Ministry

By Mike Dill

Emmaus Journey small groups are an ideal follow up to parish events that increase the desire for a relationship with Christ.

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with, and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus. Emmaus Journey's approach to disciple-making looks different from many of the Catholic non-profits that cooperate in parish ministry. Here we'll explore a few of those distinctives and what philosophy lies behind them.

Laborers in the Harvest

Emmaus Journey staff are *laborers* in Christ' harvest, focusing on the hard, slow, though rewarding work of accompanying people as they experience conversion, transformation, and mobilization. This means we grow where we are planted, and help others to do the same by giving them an example they can duplicate. Emmaus Journey staff could easily spend all their time "in the Church market," abandoning their work in the parish, and instead simply going where they are invited to teach *others* how to make disciples. But *those who can, do*, and Christ needs laborers *in* the harvest, not just foremen and consultants discussing the harvest. (cf. 1 Cor 4:20, Matt 21:28-32)

When I had the chance to visit Dr. Paul Young in his home community of Santa Rosa, California, I had already observed him speak in front of an enraptured audience, and I knew he had authored dozens of books. However, attending his small group and watching lives being transformed through Christ-centered relationships was more impressive than any of his other accomplishments. It was in his local community that Dr. Paul was accompanying men through their healing, training them up for mission, and assisting the diocese in multiplying men's groups. When Emmaus Journey staff speak or write, they do so from experience, and not just from theory.

Ad Extra

Whereas parish staff must work hard to maintain the structures *inside* (*ad intra*) the church, such as the liturgy, programs, and the building itself, Emmaus Journey can provide much needed support in focusing attention to the needs of people *outside* (*ad extra*) the walls of the church. This external focus is a large part of the teachings of Vatican II and the purpose of the New Evangelization. However, it still remains a challenge for parishes today. When disciples are mobilized for Christ, a few may be gifted to serve in formal ministry positions, but many more will be called to be witnesses in the professional and social contexts to which they already belong. The challenge is not only that disciples need someone to follow up with them, but that such work can seem unrelated to the internal operations of the parish. Too often, I meet people who have left the Catholic Church because the moment when they became serious about their relationship with Christ, they could not find relationships supportive of their spiritual journey.

This challenge is even harder for parents raising children, because the resources required to keep kids safe during studies are significant. When my wife and young child were invited to Abe and Liz Chavez's *Compañeros* Small Christian Community in Albuquerque, NM, we experienced a community that met all of these needs. The group was a mix of couples with young children. They met in the homes of the participants, and there we experienced the warmth of friendship only found in Christ. We broke bread together, studied Scripture, and took care of each other's children.



Mike Dill

continued on page 4

Emmaus Journey's Role in Parish Ministry

continued from page 3

Since Emmaus Journey staff work in and through existing parish structures, if they are thriving in their ministry, then their parishes will also thrive as disciples re-invest their labors in and through their own parishes.

We met at a time and pace that worked for our family schedule. This met so many human and spiritual needs in a way many parish-centered programs are not able, and yet forming small groups like *El Compañeros* are the hallmark of Emmaus Journey work. They also enrich the faith of Catholics with the Word of God, and enable them to be more faith-filled, supportive members of their parish. This is why the staff at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary in Albuquerque, NM collaborates with Emmaus Journey staff to organize and multiply similar type small groups.

Apostles of Follow Up

Parishes are great at running large events that can foster a transformative encounter with Christ, such as retreats or seasonal celebrations, but after the event is over, people need accompaniment to translate their experience into a way of life. Emmaus Journey small groups are an ideal follow up to parish events that increase the desire for a relationship with Christ.

Our focus on discipleship relationships also allows us to do the long-range work of accompanying or “following up” with individuals across parish borders. Last month, my friend Scott was released from prison after serving an 8-year term. I met Scott in the Army 12 years ago in a Bible study I led, before he ran into trouble with the law. During his prison sentence, his mother and I were the only two people to keep in touch with him. During our correspondence, Scott's faith grew in prison and he decided to convert to Catholicism. Through Catholic daily devotions like the rosary, he found personal freedom from the addictions that led him into trouble. When Scott moved to his mother's place in Houston, I reached out to

a friend of mine to help him go through the process of coming into full communion with the Church. I have no doubt Scott will be an asset and a powerful witness in his parish community, and Emmaus Journey's mission philosophy helped accompany him on his spiritual journey.

Paying it Forward

Emmaus Journey's chief purpose is not accomplished by building up Emmaus Journey as a non-profit organization. Instead, we are successful when we help bring about in others “an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others,”¹ thus enriching individual disciples, and helping them become better followers of Jesus. These distinctives and philosophies make Emmaus Journey different from many ‘para-church’ ministries that primarily offer a path of discipleship which leads participants into deeper engagement with the non-profit organization. Such ministries can unwittingly deprive parishes of the service of their most dynamic members. Since Emmaus Journey staff work in and through existing parish structures, if they are thriving in their ministry, then their parishes will also thrive as disciples re-invest their labors in and through their own parishes. While these outward investments can be hard to sustain, it provides the witness that so many people are longing to see: service for God without expectation of return. This is the kind of missionary discipleship we long to see multiplied.

Mike Dill and his wife Rachel are Emmaus Journey staff. The Dills have four children. As Emmaus Journey staff, Mike seeks to catalyze evangelization and discipleship through Catholic communities. Mike also serves as a major in the United States Army Reserves. They live in Colorado Springs, Colorado and are members of Holy Apostles Catholic Church.

¹ From “Goal 1” of *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*. Publication 556-9, by the USCCB, 1992.

Catholic Leaders in the past and in recent history have underscored the value of God’s word in our lives:

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Jesus Christ.” —St. Jerome

“A man who is well grounded in the testimonies of the Scripture is the bulwark of the Church.” —St. Jerome

“I wish once more to encourage all the people of God, pastors, consecrated persons and the laity, to become increasingly familiar with the sacred Scriptures. We must never forget that all authentic and living Christian spirituality is based on the word of God proclaimed, accepted, celebrated and meditated upon in the Church.” —Pope Benedict XVI, *The Word of the Lord* (Verbum Domini), p.121

I urge you to take a few moments to read and meditate on the following ways Pope Francis calls on us to engage in regular reading of the Bible to strengthen our spiritual life as Christian believers. ¹

“Dear Families, listen to the word of God, meditate on it together, pray with it, let the Lord fill your lives with mercy.”

“Everyone should carry a small Bible or pocket edition of the Gospels and should find at least a few minutes every day to read the word of God.”

“A Bible for every family! ...Not to place it on a shelf, but to keep it at hand, to read it often, every day, both individually and together, husband and wife, parents and children, maybe in the evening, especially on Sundays. This way the family grows, walks, with the light and power of the Word of God!”

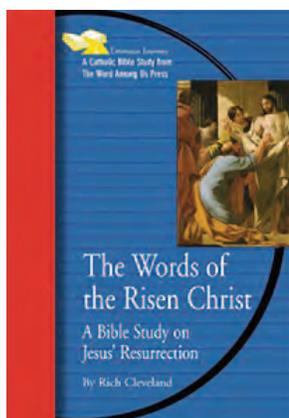
“Be constantly nourished by the Word of God.”

“I would like so much for all Christians to be able to comprehend ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ’ through the diligent reading of the Word of God, for the sacred text is the nourishment of the soul and the pure and perennial source of the spiritual life of all of us.”

“In order that the family walk well, with trust and hope, it must be nourished with the Word of God.”

1. Adapted from American Bible Society News, September 25, 2015

Tools You Can Use



Discovering that Jesus is not dead but has risen

The Words of the Risen Christ will enable you and your small groups to enter into the hearts and minds of the disciples as they joyfully discover that Jesus is not dead but has risen.

- Read Scripture,
- Walk with the disciples as they come to grips with their disappointments and shortcomings,
- Contemplate the disciple’s experiences of Jesus’ love, forgiveness, and companionship,
- Continue the Lenten Journey with this helpful resource. Now, “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

To order this Bible Study click [here](#).

The Importance of God's Word

continued from front page

How could one live without knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?

of different meanings which need to be carefully considered and related among themselves,

- ...the *Logos* refers in the first place to the eternal Word, the only Son, begotten of the Father before all ages and consubstantial with him: *the word was with God, and the word was God.*
- ...We also profess our faith that God has spoken his word in salvation history; he has made his voice heard; by the power of his Spirit 'he has spoken through the prophets.' ...Then too, the word of God is that word preached by the Apostles in obedience to the command of the Risen Jesus: ... The word of God is thus handed on in the Church's living Tradition.
- ...Finally, the word of God, attested and divinely inspired, is sacred Scripture, the Old and New Testaments. All this helps us see that, while in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book': Christianity is the 'religion of the word of God,' not of 'a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word.'"¹

Previously, as a Protestant I almost always spoke of "the Word" as the written *Holy Bible*, but Pope Benedict's subtle and important distinctions makes one read the Bible with a new consciousness of listening to the Living Word, Jesus, and dialoguing with him. The *written* Word, becomes the means of a relationship with the *Living* Word. Pope Benedict points out that "the Synod frequently insisted on the need for a prayerful approach to the sacred text as a **fundamental element** in the spiritual life of every believer. ... **The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality.**"² This statement resonates with 2 Peter 1:3,4 which says, "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by*

which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature."

Do we really believe what the Scripture and Pope Benedict XVI both proclaim about the importance of encountering the Living Word through the written Word, especially as "the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality?" If we do, the question becomes, what should we do about it? How do we recommit to and elevate the importance of engaging with sacred Scripture to a level of involvement consistent with our belief, and how the Church designates it? We physically elevate the written Word at every mass, is there not some way we can elevate its importance and frequent use by Catholic individuals. At what point do we start training Catholics, ourselves and others, to **develop the habit** of reading, studying, and meditating on God's written Word? If it is the "basis of all authentic Christian spirituality" why are these practices not introduced on day-one of all our religious education activities, and encouraged continuously? Are there some important and helpful "know how's" that we need to incorporate into our training that makes reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture **enjoyable**?

I am afraid that when we really consider the importance of the Word of God, and contrast it with the importance *we place on the Word of God*, that more questions are raised than we are *willing* to take the time to address. But we must, even as Saint Jerome did; "Truly 'in love' with the Word of God, he asked himself: '**How could one live without knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?**'" The Bible, an instrument 'by which God speaks every day to the faithful,' thus becomes a stimulus and source of Christian life for all situations and for each person."³

After thirty-five years as evangelicals, Rich Cleveland and his wife Gail became Catholic. Rich is the founder of Emmaus Journey, and he and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

¹ Taken from paragraph 7 in *The Word of the Lord* (Verbum Domini) a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, by Pope Benedict XVI. (Selections and emphasis added.)

² Ibid, paragraph 86 (Emphasis added.)

³ Pope Benedict XVI in *The Fathers*, published by Ignatius Press.