

Friday after Sexagesima: The Reading of the Scriptures

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will meditate tomorrow: first, on the reasons which ought to induce us to read and meditate upon the Holy Scriptures; second, on the manner of doing this well. We will then make the resolution: first, not to allow a single day to pass without reading at least one chapter of the Holy Scriptures; second, from time to time to read at least an abridgement of the edifying history contained in the pages of the Old Testament. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the verse of the Psalm: "*How sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth*" (Ps. CXVIII:103).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore the Holy Spirit inspiring the sacred writers, leading their hand, and by their pen leaving to all ages the storehouse of holy truths which are the riches, the treasure, and the consolation of Christians. Let us thank God for so precious a grace.

THE REASONS WHICH OUGHT TO INDUCE US TO READ AND MEDITATE UPON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

What are the Holy Scriptures? They are a letter which God sends us, after having dictated it for us to the sacred writers. Now, if a monarch wrote a letter to one of his subjects, and if, after having received it, he did not care to open and to read it, would he not be guilty of a great want of respect? With still greater reason we should be inexcusable if we neglected the reading of this divine book, in which God, in order to lower Himself to our level, hiding Himself beneath the surface of the letter, speaks to us as really as He speaks to the angels and saints in heaven. If an interview with princes and kings is esteemed to be a very precious privilege what ought not to be the reading of a book in which God speaks to us? Is His word less venerable when the eye reads it than when the ear listens to it? In the one case as in the other, is it not always His word? When we pray, says St Ambrose, we speak to God, and when we read the Holy Scriptures it is God who speaks to us. Whence this great doctor inquires: Wherefore do you not employ every moment in reading the Holy Scriptures, that is to say, in conversing with Jesus Christ? (St Ambrose, *de Officiis*, lib. III, c. XX) We have all kinds of interests to consult in this employment, for of all books it is the most useful. Holy Writ is a treasure above all treasures (Ps. CXVIII:72, 162). It is there that the infidel is converted (Ps. xviii:8); the reading of the gospel has converted thousands of men, and a few lines of the apostle St Paul sufficed to fix the irresolution of St Augustine. It is there that the afflicted soul finds its consolation. The Machabees in the midst of persecution consoled themselves by the reading of the Holy Scriptures (I Mach. xii:9), and St Paul invited the Romans to seek for consolation in the Scriptures (Rom. xv:4). It is there that the tempted soul finds a sure weapon against sin (Ps. CXVIII:11, 92), the soul that is a prey to weariness and disgust a delicious suavity (Ps. CXVIII:11), the soul in the midst of darkness, a light to direct it (Ps. CXVIII:105), the cold or tepid soul, a fire which warms it (Ps. CXVIII:140), the soul disgusted with the world, a sweet repose (Ps.

CXVIII:85). Therefore the Psalmist lovingly meditated every day upon the Holy Scriptures (Ps. CXVIII:97). Do we act in like manner? Let us condemn ourselves and be converted.

THE MANNER OF READING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Although all the books of the Bible are useful to read, there are some amongst them the reading of which is more profitable and ought, consequently, to be more familiar to us; such are, in the New Testament, the gospels, and in the gospels, the Sermon on the Mount, and the discourse after the last supper; the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St Paul to the faithful of Corinth and of Ephesus, to the Philippians, the Colossians and the Hebrews; the Epistles of St James and St Peter; in the Old Testament the book of Wisdom, of Sirach, of Ruth, of Tobias, of Esther, of Judith, and of the Maccabees, certain portions of the Pentateuch, of the Judges and of Kings. In order that this reading should be profitable, we must read, not from curiosity or the desire to learn something new, but, first, with a very pure intention to derive from it lessons and examples of virtue which may make us better; second, with a spirit of obedience to the Church, which alone is the infallible interpreter of Holy Writ, and in order to do so it is essential for us to use a correct translation, accompanied with short commentaries; third, in the presence of God, as though God Himself were there, instructing us, says St Basil; and therefore we must ask of Him by frequent aspirations to give us understanding, and to make us feel what we read (Ps. CXVIII:18); fourth, in pausing at any passage which may touch us as long as we are touched, in order to enjoy the things of God, and to allow the Holy Spirit leisure to act within us. Having thus performed our reading, we deduct from it practical resolutions tending to render us better. Have we followed these rules? If we have not followed them up till now, let us make a resolution to do so in future.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.