

Reading through the Bible, Jan. - Nov., 2008

"Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

We have been on our "reading through the Bible" journey for two and a half years and now as we enter into another New Year we continue on this path. On this journey through the New Testament and part of the Old Testament we have encountered many people, people who were also on a journey not unlike our own. It is a journey not unlike our own because throughout the ages there has been a longing in people for something greater than what they are already experiencing. Many recognize that this something greater is God, while some, sadly, never become aware of this. We are a Christian people; we are disciples of Jesus but still we yearn for an even deeper relationship with him, with our Lord and Saviour. As we meet God in His holy word, as did the people we encountered in our Bible reading program, allow Him to indeed use His word in a living and active way in our minds, in our hearts, in the whole of our lives. Allow His word to cut through all that we are and, in so doing, may it fulfill that longing and yearning that we have and may it bring us into a more vibrant and interactive relationship with Him. Allow His Spirit to look into the thoughts and intentions of our hearts to heal that which is broken and to lead us closer towards Him. Let us be open and honest before our God believing that His word can truly transform and make new.

I have once again drawn up a reading plan/schedule to help us move through the Bible in a somewhat structured manner. We will begin on January 7th at 2 Chronicles 19 and continue reading through until June 29th, ending with the wonderful book of Jeremiah. We will pause for the summer break, but hopefully even then we will continue to enter into God's word on a daily basis, choosing our own area of interest rather than this structured method. I have planned ahead and have made up the remaining schedule that will complete this intentional journey through Scripture. This plan begins again on September 1st with Lamentations and concludes in mid-November with the Book of Malachi. You will remember that we read through the Book of Psalms during the period between the Old and New Testaments. By mid-November, we will have read through the Bible together as a parish endeavour. My prayer is that each of us will have seen Jesus at times during this journey together.

Reading the Bible is a privilege that we don't always appreciate. How we receive that privilege is not based on how knowledgeable we are or how educated we are. Rather, how we receive the words of Scripture is based upon the gift of the Holy Spirit and on the condition of our hearts to receive that precious gift. I offer you some suggestions on how to prepare yourself to receive the most from God's holy word.

- You may want to look at which version of Scripture that you have available. The King James is lovely and I know that many do not want to give it up, but maybe you could read a modern version as well. At St. James' we use the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). For my own reading, I most often use the NIV (New International Version). The New King James is also easy to read, as is the more recent English Standard Version.

- When you find a place that is conducive to reading your Bible, i.e., well lit, comfortable and quiet, be still in God's presence before you begin. Acknowledge His presence there with you and ask Him to speak to you through His word. Ask God to open your heart to receive what He has to say and ask that His Holy Spirit help you to understand.
- Pray into the text. For example, if you are reading a passage about forgiveness, then stop reading and pray that God will reveal to you areas of unforgiveness in your own life. When God lays a person on your heart to forgive, then be obedient and forgive that person. Another example: if you are reading a passage on salvation, then pray for those people you know to be in need of God's salvation.
- Set a pattern for your reading. It's good to set aside a particular time of day. Early morning is often better, if possible, as later in the day we tend to become more tired and reading can sometimes make us quite drowsy. Having said that, I know for some this will be impossible to do before the end of the day. But do make it a priority some time during the day. Ask God to help you to be faithful in setting aside time for this.
- Don't hesitate to mark or underline those parts of the text that grab your attention. You may even want to write short notes beside some parts of the text. It is okay to write in our Bibles.
- Always end your Bible reading session with prayer. You have just heard God's word, now, let Him hear you speak. Give Him thanks for His word and for the opportunity to read it.
- As you leave your place of delving into God's word, remember that His blessing accompanies you. In the 1st chapter of Revelation we are told that God's blessing is on those who read God's word, as well as on those who hear it and take it to heart. Then go about your day in God's peace and under His blessing.

“Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Book of Common Prayer (1962), Collects. 2nd Sunday in Advent.

In Christ's love and mercy,
Pat Coulombe+