

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Hearing God's Word...and Keeping It"



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Mary D. Ford

"...Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it." [Luke 11:28]

"We hold up the lectionary of biblical texts in the procession that opens the celebration of the Eucharist, incense it before reading it on solemn occasions, and preface the Gospel reading with an 'Alleluia'. This is no ordinary book. Indeed, all these words and actions indicate what respect we have for the text and what hopes we have from reading and interpreting it," writes Lawrence S. Cunningham.

Much has happened to scripture reading since the 17th century of St. Francis de Sales. The thirst for Christian direction through prayerful scripture study, listening and sharing by lay men and women is a norm of the 21st century.

The Bible, a library of books, is God's Word in a unique way that is not true of any other human composition. The Second Vatican Council states that the Church serves the Word of God and pays reverence to it.

It is most interesting to read the words of St. Francis de Sales some four-hundred years ago concerning scripture. "Be devoted to the word of God whether you hear it in familiar conversations with spiritual friends or sermons.

Always listen to it with attention and reverence; make good use of it; do not let it fall to earth but take it into your heart..."

"We must prepare ourselves to hear (the Word) with the attention it deserves, not as if it were just any other word."

"We must open our hearts in the presence of the Divine Majesty, receptive to his heavenly dew."

"When we hear the Word of God in preaching or when we read it in a book, let us spiritually place it on our heads... In obedience let us submit ourselves to the things that are taught us concerning God's will for our perfection and spiritual advancement."

"Receive the Word in a spirit of humility, devotion and reverence. Hear it with attention."

His message emphasizes preparation and action when we hear the Word of God. How do we do this?

Reverence To listen with trust is to accept the Father's word. The scriptures are not so much a source of information as a word that demands a response. The Bible is not read to satisfy curiosity but to uncover a call from God and requires our response. If we accept it, it changes us. Outright rejection results in what St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scrip-

ture is ignorance of God."

Preparation Begin by studying Sunday's scripture readings. Our Church has blessed us with a structured cycle system that provides an opportunity to read over eighty percent of the Bible—use it—prepare to hear the expected and unexpected.

Attentiveness Concentrate on really hearing the Word. To listen is to be alert to what the spirit is saying to the world today. Limit distractions by being prepared.

We each bring to the Mass a variety of experiences and perspectives concerning the scripture reading. St. Francis de Sales would want us to strive to be serious Christians who take the inexhaustible richness of the Word seriously, reverently, and apply it to our lives.

In a spirit of devotion and attention, he suggests that we hear and understand the scripture truths the same as we seek perfection in all our spiritual practices.

Be kind to yourself as you make the time and the "space" to be open to God's Living Word. Remember the presence of God in the Word. Remember, most of all, the daily invitation and challenge to be God's Word in the lives of others.