



A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

it was decided by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales that the period from 30 September 2019 until the end of December 2020 the Church in England and Wales would focus on celebrating, living and sharing God's word in Holy Scripture. The year 2020 saw the 10th anniversary of *Verbum Domini*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI on The Word of the Lord. The year 2020 is also the 1,600th anniversary of St. Jerome's death. These were considered to be strong reasons for the Church to embark on a creative and deeper engagement with the Holy Scriptures across the life of the dioceses of England and Wales. Unfortunately, because of the terrible impact of the Coronavirus upon the life of the country as a whole, people's individual lives and the life of the Church, the hopes and aspirations of undertaking this engagement with Sacred Scripture have not been met. Many events celebrating *The God Who Speaks* had to be cancelled, and with each parish and diocese concentrating their attention upon simply opening their doors for the resumption of communal liturgical celebrations this initiative on the part of the Bishops' Conference has been largely ignored. It has been decided that the period 2020-2021 should now see a renewed interest in the Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Scripture is at the centre of everything the Church does. The word of God shapes our prayer and worship. The Bible shows us how to understand the

world, how we are called to live and relate to each other.

ST. JEROME (c.347-420)

Jerome was born in Strido, in Dalmatia. He studied in Rome and was baptized there. He was attracted by the ascetic life and travelled to the East, where he was (unwillingly) ordained a priest. He was recalled to Rome to act as secretary to Pope Damasus, but on the Pope's death he returned to the East, to Bethlehem, where (with the aid of St Paula and others) he founded a monastery, a hospice, and a school, and settled down to the most important work of his life, the translation of the Bible into Latin, a translation which, with some revisions, is still in use today. He wrote many works of his own, including letters and commentaries on Holy Scripture. When a time of troubles came upon the world, through barbarian invasions, and to the Church, through internal dissension, he helped the refugees and those in need. He died at Bethlehem.

IGNORANCE OF SCRIPTURE IS IGNORANCE OF CHRIST

I interpret as I should, following the command of Christ: *Search the Scriptures*, and *Seek and you shall find*. Christ will not say to me what he said to the Jews: *You erred, not knowing the Scriptures and not knowing the power of God*. For if, as Paul says, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and if the man who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

Therefore, I will imitate the head of a household who brings out of his storehouse things both new and old, and says to his spouse in the Song of Songs: *I have kept for you things new and old, my beloved*. In this way permit me to explain Isaiah, showing that he was not only a prophet, but an evangelist and an apostle as well. For he says about himself and the other evangelists: *How beautiful are the feet of those who*

preach good news, of those who announce peace. And God speaks to him as if he were an apostle: *Whom shall I send, who will go to my people?* And he answers: *Here I am; send me.*

No one should think that I mean to explain the entire subject matter of this great book of Scripture in one brief sermon, since it contains all the mysteries of the Lord. It prophesies that Emmanuel is to be born of a virgin and accomplish marvellous works and signs. It predicts his death, burial and resurrection from the dead as the Saviour of all men. I need say nothing about the natural sciences, ethics and logic. Whatever is proper to holy Scripture, whatever can be expressed in human language and understood by the human mind, is contained in the book of Isaiah. Of these mysteries the author himself testifies when he writes: *You will be given a vision of all things, like words in a sealed scroll. When they give the writings to a wise man, they will say: Read this. And he will reply: I cannot, for it is sealed. And when the scroll is given to an uneducated man and he is told: Read this, he will reply: I do not know how to read.*

Should this argument appear weak to anyone, let him listen to the Apostle: *Let two or three prophets speak, and let others interpret; if, however, a revelation should come to one of those who are seated there, let the first one be quiet.* How can they be silent, since it depends on the Spirit who speaks through his prophets whether they remain silent or speak? If they understood what they were saying, all things would be full of wisdom and knowledge. But it was not the air vibrating with the human voice that reached their ears, but rather it was God speaking within the soul of the prophets, just as another prophet says: *It is an angel who spoke in me,* and again, *Crying out in our hearts, Abba, Father,* and *I shall listen to what the Lord God says within me.*

St. Jerome Prologue of the Commentary on Isaiah



St. Jerome In His Study (1442)
Jan van Eyck (c.1390-1441) and his school

REPORT ON THE APOSTOLIC LETTER OF POPE FRANCIS DEVOTION TO SACRED SCRIPTURE

Pope Francis has unexpectedly released a new Apostolic Letter to mark the 1600th anniversary of the death of St Jerome.

In the letter, published 30 September, the Pope praises Jerome's "devotion to the Sacred Scripture" which was, Francis states, "a 'living and tender love' for the written word of God".

Jerome (c.347- 420AD) a Doctor and Father of the Church, is best known for his translations of the bible, which formed the majority of the text later known as the Vulgate bible - for centuries, the Church's official translation. A prolific writer of bible commentaries, homilies,

and letters, he is the patron saint of translators, archaeologists, archivists and bible scholars. Pope Francis's new letter, *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* ("Devotion to Sacred Scripture"), praises him as a model of learning, faith and spirituality.

"Jerome's profound knowledge of the Scriptures, his zeal for making their teaching known, his skill as an interpreter of texts, his ardent and at times impetuous defence of Christian truth, his asceticism and harsh eremitical discipline, his expertise as a generous and sensitive spiritual guide", the Pope writes, "all these make him, sixteen centuries after his death, a figure of enduring relevance for us, the Christians of the twenty-first century."

The Pope drew particular attention to Jerome's "humble" but "diligent" study of the Bible, which he presents as a model to Christians studying scripture today. Jerome's study was carried out in a spirit of obedience "to those in the Church who represent the living Tradition that interprets the revealed message". But, the Pope argues, "The 'obedience of faith' is not, however, a mere passive reception of something already known; on the contrary it demands an active personal effort to understand what was spoken." In a world where many people lack the skills needed to interpret the texts of scripture, "Jerome can serve as our guide... because he leads every reader to the mystery of Jesus".

And in this - the Pope writes - Jerome presents a challenge and a call to young Christians in particular. "Begin exploring your heritage" - the Pope concludes - "Christianity makes you heirs of an unsurpassed cultural patrimony of which you must take ownership. Be passionate about this history which is yours. Dare to fix your gaze on the young Jerome, who, like the merchant in Jesus' parable, sold all he had in order to buy the 'pearl of great price'."

From *The Tablet*

A copy of *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* is sent with this week's Newsletter.



St. Jerome and the Lion (c. 1450-1465)
Rogier van der Weyden or his studio

The painting depicts a scene from the legend of St. Jerome. In the legend St. Jerome is said to be giving a lecture to his students in Bethlehem when a limping lion came to him. While the others fled, the saint welcomed the lion. He examined the injured foot and extracted the thorn he found there. This cured the foot and the lion stayed with St. Jerome until his death.

St. Jerome is depicted as an old man in a cardinal's outfit, which is anachronistic as cardinals did not exist in the fourth or early fifth centuries. The traditional red garments are lined with white fur and the cardinal's hat sits by his side. A book lies open on his lap. St. Jerome is seated on a rock outside of a cave and is turning towards the lion to attend to his paw. The saint also appears in the upper left corner of the painting. This image of Jerome shows him in prayer with his eyes raised to the heavens and a hand resting on the open pages of a book, likely the Scriptures. His cardinal's gown is discarded on the ground beside him and the saint is instead clothed in a hair shirt. This painting inspired a genre of St. Jerome art.