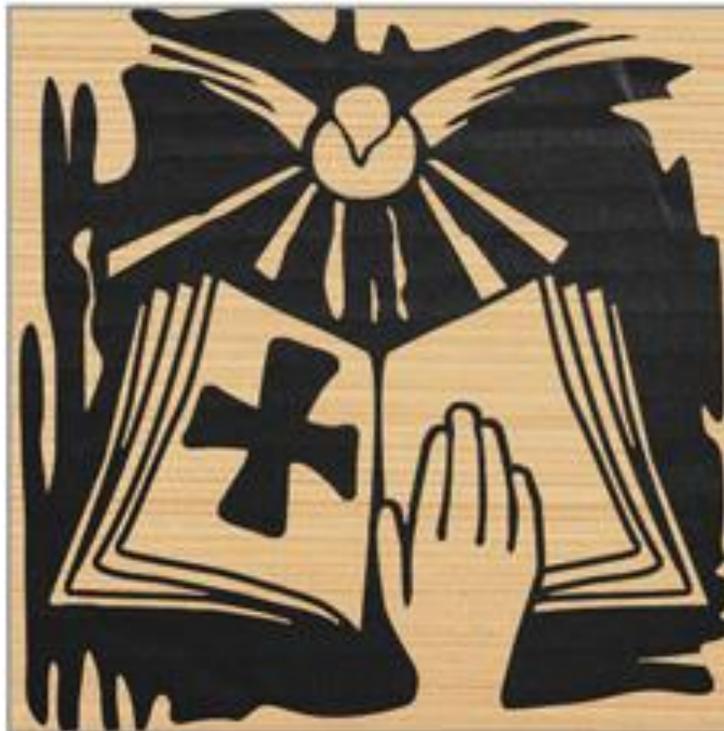


Enthroned the Bible in Your Home



Stephen J. Binz

The Catholic Book for Church and Home

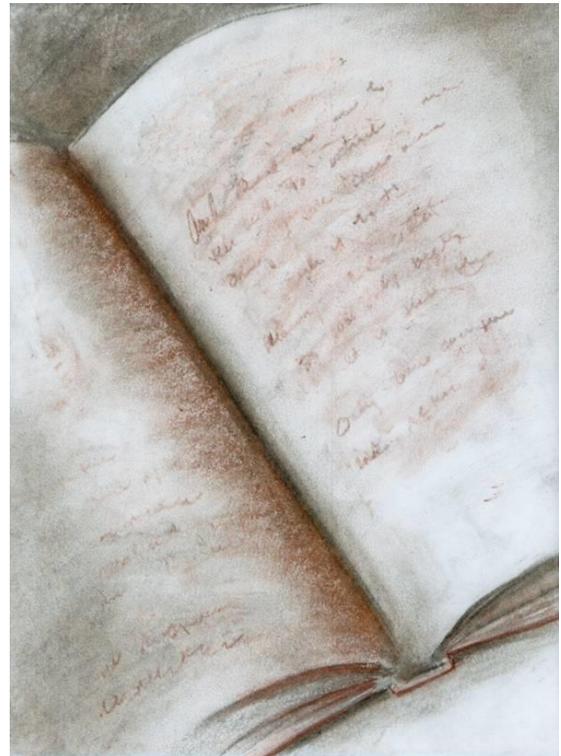
The Bible is no longer a closed, dusty book on the shelves of Catholic homes. More and more we are realizing that the Bible is truly the Book of the Church -- to be honored, read, and proclaimed. It is the story of our ancestors; it is the family album of the people of God. The sacred Scriptures are at the very core of being Catholic.

Throughout the long history of our church, the book of the Scriptures has been the honored symbol of God's living word present in our midst. The open Bible—enthroned at church councils, in cathedrals and parish churches, and in Christian homes—bespeaks a rich tradition. At the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century, the Scriptures were enthroned in the midst of the bishops as they prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This tradition continued through the Second Vatican Council where the Scriptures were enthroned as a sign of Christ's presence during the deliberations in St. Peter's Basilica.

Our church teaches that Christ is present in word and sacrament, in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist. "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life."¹ Processions, candles, bowing, and incense all express our church's reverence for the inspired word as it is enthroned, opened, and proclaimed in Catholic worship.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 141.

We can continue this ancient tradition of Bible enthronement in our own homes. Just as we set the sacred Scriptures in a place of honor in our churches, we can place the Holy Bible in an honorable location in our homes. The Bible enthroned in Catholic homes is a continual reminder that God's word speaks to us in the joys and struggles of everyday life.



Every Catholic home is a "domestic church." "In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength;"² so the word of God can bring comfort, challenge, inspiration, and guidance to every home.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 104

A Prayer Service for Enthronement of the Bible

Reverently place the open Bible on a bookstand or table top. You may add other sacramentals to this display such as a candle, crucifix, icon, flowers or plants. The enthroned Bible will serve as a powerful symbol of God's living word and as a reminder to make scriptural reflection and prayer a regular part of your life.

Leader: We gather together in our home to honor the Book of the Church, the sacred Scriptures. We believe that through these inspired writings, God speaks to us. We believe that through the word of God we are taught, encouraged, and challenged. We pray that this enthroned Bible may be for us a constant reminder to seek God's word, to learn from its saving truth, and to apply it to our lives each day. Let us pray...

All: Ever-living God, we long for your presence and we thirst for your word. Send your Holy Spirit so that the Bible can be for us a source of spiritual growth and strength. Give us a deep love for the sacred Scriptures so that we may know your truth, grow in love for you, and follow your way more faithfully.

Reader: Let us listen to the prophet Isaiah as he speaks about God's word as a penetrating rain, watering the earth so that it may bear fruit. Read Isaiah 55:10-11

*Reverently take the Bible from its place and read the passage slowly.
Return the Bible to its place, and pause for silent reflection.*

Leader: The word of God is a life-giving rain for our dry land. (Isa 55:10)

All: Come and refresh us so that we can grow in Christ and bear fruit for others.

Leader: The word of God is a lamp for my feet, a light to my path. (Ps 119:105)

All: Come and guide us through the dark valleys of life with your shining light.

Leader: The word of God is a fertile seed that depends on rich soil. (Mark 4:20)

All: Come and take root within us so that your word may flourish and bear a rich harvest.

Leader: The word of God is a flaming fire and a hammer shattering rocks. (Jer 23:29)

All: Come and enflame our lives and break the hardness of our hearts so that our words may be faithful and true.

Leader: The word of God is living and effective, sharper than a two-edged sword. (Heb 4:12)

All: Come and penetrate our spirits, stirring our passion for goodness and justice.

Leader: The word of God motivates us to action, so that we can be doers of the word and not hearers only. (Jam 1:22)

All: Come and energize us so that your presence may inspire our daily decisions and actions.

Leader: The word of God will stand forever as all else passes away. (Isa 40:8)

All: Come and live with us always as our source of unchanging truth and love.

Reader: Let us listen to the words of the risen Lord, as he speaks to us through the Gospel according to Luke. Read Luke 24:44-45

Take the Bible from its place and read the passage slowly. Return the Bible to its place, and pause for silent reflection.

Reader: Let us listen to the teachings of our church concerning sacred Scripture from the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

“Access to sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.³ The church forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. ‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’”⁴

³ Constitution on Divine Revelation, 21-22; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 131.

⁴ St. Jerome; Constitution on Divine Revelation, 25; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 133.

Commitment to the Word of God

Leader: Do you believe that the Creator of the world spoke the word to the people of ancient Israel for the salvation of all the nations?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe that the Word of God was made flesh and continues to live among us as the Good News for all?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe that God sent the Holy Spirit among us to lead us to truth and to guide our understanding of God's word?

All: I do.

Leader: I invite you to approach the Bible individually and place your hands upon it. This is a sign of our personal commitment to seek the word of life in the Scriptures.

All approach the Bible, place their hands on its open pages, and pray a silent prayer of personal commitment.

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Loving God, help us to open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts. May we always welcome your word of life, as you come to us with your wisdom, your truth, and your love. Amen.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of the peace of Christ.

Reading the Bible as the Word of God

Don't just leave the Scriptures enthroned in their place of honor. We show reverence for the Bible when we read it, reflect upon it, study it, and pray over it—only then does it become a life-giving word. When we hold the Bible in our hands, we must realize that God desires to communicate with us. But like all communication, the quality of our encounter with God depends on our predisposition. When we read the Scriptures reflectively, we come into the presence of God who wants to transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

People sometimes feel reluctant to begin reading the Bible. It seems too big, too difficult, too controversial, too ancient. The following points about the Bible may help overcome some of these obstacles:

- ✚ First, the Bible is not just one large book; it is a library of 73 small books. We will feel less intimidated by choosing just one book at a time for reading.
- ✚ Second, the Bible was never meant to be difficult. It was written by simple people, who spoke in the ordinary language of their time. It

expresses the faith of imperfect people like ourselves—people who believe that God cares about them and acts in their lives.

- ✚ Third, the Bible was never intended to cause conflict between people or to be used as a weapon. Using the Bible to prove points and show that others are wrong is a serious abuse of the Bible. Approach these books with humility and wonder—they are the sacred literature of God's people.
- ✚ Fourth, the Bible is an ancient book, but it is also a contemporary book. Peoples' basic needs, questions and struggles are the same in every age and every culture. The Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical authors so long ago also guides our lives today.

As you begin a regular practice of Bible reading, dedicate a specific place and commit yourself to a quiet time. Symbols such as a candle or crucifix may help you stay focused. Always begin with prayer, asking God to open your mind and heart for a genuine encounter with the word.

When reflecting on a biblical passages, follow four steps:

1. observation (What does the passage say?)
2. interpretation (What does the passage mean?)
3. reflection (What does it mean to me? my life? my relationships? my faith?)
4. application (What am I going to do about it?)

In prayerful reading of Scripture, we allow God's word to become a personal word. Because the Bible was written in ancient times, it is important to “actualize” the texts—to understand their meaning in light of the new situations and circumstances of our lives today. Reflecting on the present meaning of a passage always implies a personal challenge and a personal response.

The Bible does not so much tell us what to do as it tells us who we are. The Bible is not a complete answer guide for all the issues of life. Rather, the characters and events of the Bible serve as models for people in every age who are trying to live in a growing relationship with God.

Besides being a personal word, the

Bible is a communal word. The context for reading the Bible is not only my personal life, but the faith life I share with the people of God through the ages. The Bible is the inspired literature produced by the community of faith as they sought to understand the meaning of their experience of God.

The Bible came from the community of faith. It is therefore within a community experience that the Bible can best be understood and applied to our lives. One way to achieve this important balance between personal and communal Bible study is to pray with the Scriptures personally throughout the week and then to gather weekly with others who are seeking to encounter God through the Scriptures. In community our own limited perspective is enriched by the insights and experiences of others.

Our church has issued the invitation to all Catholics to come and feast at the table of God's word. The Scriptures have the power to change our hearts and to transform our lives, as individuals and as church. May the open Bible express for us the living word of God, alive and active today.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Try one of these Bible passages for each session of Bible reading. The reading may be followed by personal reflection or group discussion. A good question to ask is: “What does this passage mean to me?”

Rom 12	Advice for Christian Living
I Cor 13	The Gift of Genuine Love
Mark 4:1-20	Parable of the Sower
Luke 4:16-21	Jesus Reads from the Scroll
John 14	The Comforting Words of Jesus
1 John 1	The Word of Life Made Visible
Exodus 19	The Manifestation of God
Isaiah 40	The Saving Power of God
Psalms 103	Praise of God's Goodness
Psalms 139	God is Always Present for Us
Nehemiah 8	Ezra Proclaims the Scriptures
Luke 24	Appearances of the Risen Lord
Hebrews 9	The Sacrifice of the Covenant
Ephesians 4	Live the Calling You Have Received
Colossians 1	Progress in the Life of Christ
James 1	Steadfastness in Times of Trial

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