



Read The Gospel

*Collection of Pope Francis' exhortation
on The Importance of reading the Gospel*

Pope Francis talks about Reading the Gospel every day

“The Gospel lets you know the true Jesus, it lets you know the living Jesus; it speaks to your heart and changes your life,” said Pope Francis during his weekly Angelus appearance in St. Peter’s Square on Sunday, July 27.

The pope spoke about the two parables about the kingdom of Heaven: the jewel merchant who finds a pearl of infinite value and sells everything he owns to buy it, and the farmer who chances upon hidden treasure and sells all his land to buy the field where it lies. Neither the merchant nor the farmer have any doubt about their actions as they are aware of the incomparable value of what they have found.

“It is the same with the kingdom of God,” explained the pope. “He who finds it has no doubt, he knows that he has found what he sought and awaited, and which answers his most authentic aspirations. It is truly like this: those who know Jesus, who encounter Him personally, are fascinated, attracted by such goodness, such truth, such beauty, and all this in great humility and simplicity. Seeking and finding Jesus: this is the greatest treasure of all!”

“How many people, how many saints, reading the Gospel with an open heart, have been so struck by Jesus that they have converted to Him. Let us think of St. Francis of Assisi; he was already a Christian, but lukewarm, a “rose-water” Christian. When he read the Gospel, in a decisive moment during his youth, he encountered Jesus and discovered the Kingdom of God, and from then on all his dreams of earthly glory vanished. The Gospel lets you know the true Jesus, it lets you know the living Jesus; it speaks to your heart and changes your life. And from then on, he left everything. You can effectively change the type of life you lead, or continue to do what you did before, but you are different, you are born again: you have found that which gives meaning, flavor and light to everything, even to hardship, suffering and death.”

The pope went on to repeat the importance of reading a passage from the Gospel every day; of keeping it in our pockets, our bags, always at hand, as “everything makes sense when you find this treasure that Jesus called ‘the Kingdom of God’: that is, God Who reigns in your life, in our lives. God is love, peace and joy in every man and in all men. ... Reading the Gospel means finding Jesus and receiving this Christian joy, which is a gift from the Holy Spirit.”

“The joy of encountering the treasure of the Kingdom of God becomes clear, it can be seen,” Pope Francis concluded. “The Christian cannot conceal his faith, as it shines through in every word

and every gesture, even the simplest everyday ones. The love that God has given us through Jesus shines through. Let us pray, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, that His Kingdom of love, justice and peace may come to us and to all the world.”

In the prayer at the beginning of the Mass we asked the Lord for two graces: “To listen to Your beloved Son”, so that our faith might be nourished by the Word of God, and another grace — “to purify the eyes of our spirit, so that we might one day enjoy the vision of glory”. To listen, the grace to listen, and the grace to purify our eyes. This is directly related to the Gospel we heard. When the Lord is transfigured before Peter, James and John, they hear the voice of God the Father say: “This is my beloved Son! listen to him!”. The grace to listen to Jesus. Why? To nourish our faith with the Word of God. And this is the duty of the Christian.

What are the duties of the Christian? Perhaps you will say to me: to go to Mass on Sundays; to fast and abstain during Holy Week; to do this.... Yet the first duty of the Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because he speaks to us and he saves us by his word. And by this word he makes our faith even stronger and more robust. Listen to Jesus! “But, Father, I do listen to Jesus, I listen a lot!”. “Yes? What do you listen to?”. “I listen to the radio, I listen to the television, I listen to people gossip”.

We listen to so many things throughout the day, so many things.... But I ask you a question: do we take a little time each day to listen to Jesus, to listen to Jesus' word? Do we have the Gospels at home? And do we listen to Jesus each day in the Gospel, do we read a passage from the Gospel? Or are we afraid of this, or unaccustomed to reading it? To listen to Jesus' word in order to nourish ourselves! This means that Jesus' word is the most nourishing food for the soul: it nourishes our souls, it nourishes our faith! I suggest that each day you take a few minutes and read a nice passage of the Gospel and hear what happens there.

Hearing Jesus, and each day Jesus' word enters our hearts and makes us stronger in faith. I also suggest that you have a little Gospel, very little, to carry in your pocket, in your purse, and when we have a little time, perhaps on the bus ... when it's possible on the bus, because on the bus it's often a bit difficult to keep our balance and guard our pockets, isn't it?.... But when you are seated, here or there, you can also read during the day. Take the Gospel and read two little words. Having the Gospel with us always! It was said that several of the early martyrs — St Cecilia for example — always carried the Gospel with them: they carried the Gospel; she, Cecilia, carried the Gospel. Because it is truly our basic meal, it is Jesus' word, which nourishes our faith.

And then the second grace we requested was the grace of purifying our eyes, the eyes of our spirit, to

prepare the eyes of the spirit for eternal life. Purifying the eyes! I am invited to listen to Jesus, and Jesus manifests himself, and by his Transfiguration he invites us to gaze at him. And looking at Jesus purifies our eyes and prepares them for eternal life, for the vision of heaven. Perhaps our eyes are a little sick because we see so many things that are not of Jesus, things that are even against Jesus: worldly things, things that do not benefit the light of the soul. And in this way, this light is slowly extinguished, and without knowing it, we end up in interior darkness, in spiritual darkness, in a darkened faith: darkness, because we are unaccustomed to looking and imagining the things of Jesus.

This is what we asked today of the Father, who teaches us to listen to Jesus and to gaze at Jesus. To listen to his word, and think about what I was telling you about the Gospel: it is very important! And to see, when I read the Gospel imagining and looking at what Jesus was like, how he did things. And thus our minds, our hearts go forward on the journey of hope on which the Lord places us, as we heard he did to our father Abraham. Always remember: to listen to Jesus, to make our faith stronger; to gaze at Jesus, to prepare our eyes for the beautiful vision of his Face, where we all — may the Lord grant us the grace — will be at a Mass without end. So be it.

Many people, many saints, reading the Gospel with an open heart, have been so struck by Jesus they they convert to Him. Let us think of St Francis of

Assisi: he was already a Christian, though a “rosewater” Christian. When he read the Gospel, in that decisive moment of his youth, he encountered Jesus and discovered the Kingdom of God; with this, all his dreams of worldly glory vanished. The Gospel allows you to know the real Jesus, it lets you know the living Jesus; it speaks to your heart and changes your life. And then yes, you leave it all. You can effectively change lifestyles, or continue to do what you did before but you are someone else, you are reborn: you have found what gives meaning, what gives flavour, what gives light to all things, even to toil, even to suffering, and even to death.

Read the Gospel. Read the Gospel. We have spoken about it, do you remember? To read a passage of the Gospel every day; and to carry a little Gospel with us, in our pocket, in a purse, in some way, to keep it at hand. And there, reading a passage, we will find Jesus. Everything takes on meaning when you find your treasure there, in the Gospel. Jesus calls it “the Kingdom of God”, that is to say, God who reigns in your life, in our life; God who is love, peace and joy in every man and in all men. This is what God wants and it is why Jesus gave himself up to death on the cross, to free us from the power of darkness and to move us to the kingdom of life, of beauty, of goodness and of joy. To read the Gospel is to find Jesus and to have this Christian joy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, the joy of finding the treasure of the Kingdom of God shines through, it’s

visible. The Christian cannot keep his faith hidden, because it shines through in every word, in every deed, even the most simple and mundane: the love that God has given through Jesus shines through. Let us pray, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, that His Kingdom of love, justice and peace may reign in us and in the whole world.

Indeed, we Christians live in the world, fully integrated into the social and cultural reality of our time, and rightly so; but this brings with it the risk that we might become “worldly”, that “the salt might lose its taste”, as Jesus would say (cf. Mt 5:13). In other words, the Christian could become “watered down”, losing the charge of newness which comes to him from the Lord and from the Holy Spirit. Instead it should be the opposite: when the power of the Gospel remains alive in Christians, it can transform “criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life” (Paul VI Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 19). It is sad to find “watered-down” Christians, who seem like watered-down wine. One cannot tell whether they are Christian or worldly, like watered-down wine; one cannot tell whether it is wine or water! This is sad. It is sad to find Christians who are no longer the salt of the earth, and we know that when salt loses its taste, it is no longer good for anything. Their salt has lost its taste because they have delivered themselves up to the spirit of the world, that is, they have become worldly.

This is why it is necessary to renew oneself by continually drawing sap from the Gospel. And how can one do this in practice? First of all by actually reading and meditating on the Gospel every day, so the Word of Jesus may always be present in our life. Remember: it will help you to always carry the Gospel with you: a small Gospel, in a pocket, in a bag, and read a passage during the day. But always with the Gospel, because it is carrying the Word of Jesus, and being able to read it. In addition, attending Sunday Mass, where we encounter the Lord in the community, we hear his Word and receive the Eucharist which unites us with Him and to one another; and then days of retreat and spiritual exercises are very important for spiritual renewal. Gospel, Eucharist, Prayer. Do not forget: Gospel, Eucharist, Prayer. Thanks to these gifts of the Lord we are able to conform not to the world but to Christ, and follow him on his path, the path of “losing one’s life” in order to find it (Mt 16:25). “To lose it” in the sense of giving it, offering it through love and in love — and this leads to sacrifice, also the cross — to receive it liberated from selfishness and from the mortgage of death, newly purified, full of eternity.

And so, what is the Word of God like? The Letter to the Hebrews, began by saying that, since ancient times, God had spoken, and he spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these times, at the end of that world, he spoke through the Son. In other words, the Word of God is Jesus, Jesus himself. That is what Paul was preaching, when he said:

“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Christ crucified”.

This is the Word of God, the only Word of God. And Jesus Christ is a reason for scandal: the Cross of Christ scandalizes. That is the strength of the Word of God: Jesus Christ, the Lord.

It becomes so important, to ask ourselves: “How do we receive the Word of God?”. The response is clear: “As one receives Jesus Christ. The Church tells us that Jesus is present in the Scripture, in His Word”. This is why, I have advised you many times to always carry a small Gospel with you — moreover, it costs little to buy it, to keep it in your purse, in your pocket, and read a passage from the Gospel during the day. Some practical advice, not so much to learn something, but mostly to find Jesus, because Jesus actually is in His Word, in His Gospel. Every time I read the Gospel, I find Jesus.

And what is the right attitude to receive this Word? It must be received as one receives Jesus, that is, with an open heart, with a humble heart, with the spirit of the Beatitudes. Because this is how Jesus came, in humility: he came in poverty, he came anointed by the Holy Spirit. Such that he himself began his discourse in the Synagogue of Nazareth with these words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Good

News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”.

Thus, he is strength, he is the Word of God, because he was anointed by the Holy Spirit. In this way, , we too, if we want to hear and receive the Word of God, we must pray to the Holy Spirit and ask for this anointing of the heart, which is the unction of the Beatitudes. Thus, to have a heart like the heart of the Beatitudes.

As Jesus is present in the Word of God, and He speaks to us in the Word of God, it will do us good during the day today to ask ourselves: How do I receive the Word of God?

Pope Francis Baptism of the Lord Mass

In the First Reading we heard that the Lord takes care of his children like a parent: He takes care to provide his children with nourishing food. God says through the Prophet: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?” (Is 55:2). God, like a good father and a good mother, wants to give good things to his children. And what is this nourishing food that God gives us? It is his Word: his Word makes us grow, it enables us to bear good fruit in life, just as the rain and snow imbue the earth, making it fruitful (cf. Is 55:10-11). Likewise you, parents, and you too, godmothers and godfathers,

grandparents, aunts and uncles, will help these children grow if you give them the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus. And give it also by your example! Every day, make it a habit to read a passage of the Gospel, a small one, and always carry a little Gospel with you in your pocket, in your purse, so you can read it. And this will set the example for your children, seeing dad, mom, their godparents, grandpa, grandma, aunts and uncles, reading the Word of God.

You, mothers, give milk to your children — even now, if they are crying with hunger, feed them, don't worry. Let us thank the Lord for the gift of milk, and let us pray for those mothers — there are so many, unfortunately — who are unable to breast-feed their children. Let us pray and let us try to help these mothers. Thus, what milk does for the body, the Word of God does for the spirit: the Word of God makes faith grow. And thanks to faith we have been begotten by God. This is what happens at Baptism. We have heard the Apostle John: “Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God” (1 Jn 5:1). Your children are baptized in this faith. Today it is your faith, dear parents, godfathers and godmothers. It is the faith of the Church, in which these little ones receive Baptism. But tomorrow, by the grace of God, it will be their faith, their personal “yes” to Jesus Christ, which gives us the Father's love.

I said: it is the faith of the Church. This is very important. Baptism integrates us into the body of

the Church, into the holy People of God. And in this body, in this people journeying on, faith is passed down from generation to generation: it is the faith of the Church. It is the faith of Mary, our Mother, the faith of St Joseph, of St Peter, of St Andrew, of St John, the faith of the Apostles and of the Martyrs, which has come down to us, through Baptism: the chain of transmission of the faith. This is really beautiful! It is a passing of the flame of faith from hand to hand: we too will soon express it with the act of lighting candles from the great Paschal candle. The large wax candle represents the Risen Christ, living in our midst. You, families, take the light of faith from Him in order to pass it on to your children. You receive this light in the Church, in the Body of Christ, in the People of God who are journeying through every time and in every place. Teach your children that one cannot be a Christian outside of the Church, one cannot follow Jesus Christ without the Church, for the Church is Mother, who makes us grow in the love of Jesus Christ.

One last feature emerges powerfully from today's Bible Readings: in Baptism we are consecrated by the Holy Spirit. This is what the word "Christian" means, it means consecrated like Jesus, in the same Spirit in which Jesus was immersed throughout his earthly existence. He is the "Christ", the Anointed One, the Consecrated One; we, the baptized, are "Christian", meaning consecrated, anointed. Therefore, dear parents, dear godfathers and godmothers, if you want your children to become

true Christians, help them to grow up “immersed” in the Holy Spirit, that is to say, in the warmth of the love of God, in the light of his Word. For this reason, do not forget to invoke the Holy Spirit often, every day. “Do you pray, Ma’am?” — “Yes” — “Whom do you pray to?”. — “I pray to God”. But “God” does not exist like this: God is one person, and as a Person the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist. “Whom do you pray to?”. — “The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit”. We usually pray to Jesus. When we pray the “Our Father”, we pray to the Father. But we do not often pray to the Holy Spirit. It is very important to pray to the Holy Spirit, because He teaches us how to bring up the family, the children, so that these children may grow up in the atmosphere of the Holy Trinity. It is precisely the Spirit who leads them forward. For this reason, do not forget to invoke the Holy Spirit often, every day. You can do so, for example, with this simple prayer: “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love”. You can say this prayer for your children, as well as, naturally, for yourselves!

After all, hope is learned only by looking to Jesus, contemplating Jesus; we learn through contemplative prayer. I can ask you: how do you pray?. Someone, he said, might respond: “Father, I say the prayers I learned as a child”. Okay, this is good. Someone else might add: “I pray the rosary too, every day!” It’s good to pray the rosary every day. And finally, one might say: “I also talk with the Lord, when I have a problem, or with Our Lady or with the saints...”. And “this is good” too.

Do you pray in contemplation? The question might throw us a curve, and someone might ask: “What is this, Father? What is this prayer? Where can we buy it? How do we do it?”. It can be done only with the Gospel in hand. Basically, you pick up the Gospel, select a passage, read it once, read it twice; imagine, as if you see what is happening, and contemplate Jesus.

Contemplative prayer helps us to hope and teaches us to live from the substance of the Gospel. And this is why we must always pray: say prayers, pray the rosary, speak with the Lord, but also carry out this contemplative prayer in order to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. From here comes hope. And also this way, our Christian life moves within that framework, between memory and hope: the memory of the entire past journey, the memory of so many graces received from the Lord; and hope, looking to the Lord, who is the only One who can give me hope. And to look to the Lord, to know the Lord, we pick up the Gospel and we pray in contemplation.

Today for example find 10 minutes, 15 minutes and no more: read the Gospel, imagine and speak with Jesus. And nothing more. And in this way, your knowledge of Jesus will be greater and your hope will grow. Don't forget, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus. This is why we call it “contemplative prayer”.

Listening to Jesus' preaching. "How can I do this, Father? On which TV channel does Jesus speak?". He speaks to you in the Gospel! And this is an attitude that we still do not have: to go to seek the word of Jesus in the Gospel. To always carry a Gospel with us, a small one, or to have one at our fingertips. Five minutes, 10 minutes.

When I am travelling or when I have to wait..., I take the Gospel from my pocket, or from my bag and I read something; or at home. And Jesus speaks to me, Jesus preaches to me there. It is the Word of Jesus. And we have to get accustomed to this: to hear the Word of Jesus, to listen to the Word of Jesus in the Gospel. To read a passage, think a bit about what it says, what it is saying to me. If I don't feel it is speaking to me, I move to another.

But to have this daily contact with the Gospel, to pray with the Gospel; because this way Jesus preaches to me, He says with the Gospel what He wants to tell me. I know people who always carry it and when they have a little time they open it, and this way they always find the right word for the moment they are living in. This is the first thing I wanted to say to you: let the Lord preach to you. Listen to the Lord.

And Jesus heals: let yourselves be healed by Jesus.

We all have wounds, everyone: spiritual wounds, sins, hostility, jealousy; perhaps we don't say hello to someone: "Ah, he did this to me, I won't

acknowledge him anymore”. But this needs to be healed!

“How do I do it?”. Pray and ask that Jesus heal it”.

It's sad in a family when siblings don't speak to each other for a small matter; something stupid*1, because the devil takes a small matter, something stupid and makes a world of it. Then hostilities go on, and multiply for many years, and that family is destroyed. Parents suffer because their children don't speak to each other, or one son's wife doesn't speak to the other, and thus, with jealousy, envy.... The devil sows this. The devil is the "father of hate", the "father of lies" who seeks disunity. But God wants unity. If in your heart you feel jealousy, this is the beginning of war. Jealousies are not of God. *1

And the only One who casts out demons is Jesus. The only One who heals these matters is Jesus.

For this reason I say to each one of you: let yourself be healed by Jesus. Each one knows where his wounds are. Each one of us has them; we don't have only one: two, three, four, 20. Each one knows! May Jesus heal those wounds. But for this I must open my heart, in order that He may come. How do I open my heart? By praying. “But Lord, I can't with those people over there. I hate them. They did this, this and this...”. “Heal this wound, Lord”. If we ask Jesus for this grace, He will do it. Let yourself be healed by Jesus. Let Jesus heal you. Let Jesus preach to you and let Him heal you. This way I can

even preach to others, to teach the words of Jesus, because I let Him preach to me; and I can also help heal many wounds, the many wounds that there are. But first I have to do it: let Him preach to me and heal me.

When the bishop comes to make a visit to the parishes, we do many things. We can also make a nice proposal, a small one: the proposal to read a passage of the Gospel every day, a short passage, in order to let Jesus preach to me. And the other proposal: to pray that I let myself be healed of the wounds I have. Agreed? Shall we sign? Okay? Let's do it, because this will be good for everyone.

What does he say? Jesus begins his preaching with these words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). God is near, that is the first message. His kingdom has come down to earth. God is not, as we are often tempted to think, distant, up in heaven, detached from the human condition. No, he is in our midst. The time of his distance ended when, in Jesus, he became man. Ever since then, God has been very close to us; he will never retire from our human condition or tire of it. This closeness is the very first message of the Gospel; today's reading tells us that Jesus "was saying" (v. 15) those words: he kept repeating them. "God is near" was the leitmotif of his preaching, the heart of his message. If this was the opening theme and the refrain of all Jesus' preaching, it must necessarily be the one constant of the Christian life and message. Before all else, we must believe and proclaim that

God has drawn near to us, that we have been forgiven and shown mercy. Prior to every word of ours about God, there is his word to us, his Word who continues to tell us: “Do not be afraid, I am with you. I am at your side and I will always be there”.

The word of God enables us to touch this closeness, since – as the Book of Deuteronomy tells us – it is not far from us, it is near to our hearts (cf. 30:14). It is the antidote to our fear of having to face life alone. Indeed, by his word the Lord consoles us, that is, he stands “with” (con-) those who are “alone” (soli). In speaking to us, he reminds us that he has taken us to heart, that we are precious in his eyes, and that he holds us in the palm of his hand. God’s word infuses this peace, but it does not leave us in peace. It is a word of consolation but also a call to conversion. “Repent”, says Jesus, immediately after proclaiming God’s closeness. For, thanks to his closeness, we can no longer distance ourselves from God and from others. The time when we could live thinking only of ourselves is now over. To do so is not Christian, for those who experience God’s closeness cannot ignore their neighbours or treat them with indifference. Those who hear God’s word are constantly reminded that life is not about shielding ourselves from others, but about encountering them in the name of God who is near. The word sown in the soil of our hearts, leads us in turn to sow hope through closeness to others. Even as God has done with us.

Let us now consider to whom Jesus speaks. His first words are to Galilean fishermen, simple folk who lived by harsh manual labour, by day and night. They were no experts in Scripture or people of great knowledge and culture. They lived in a region made up of various peoples, ethnic groups and cults: one that could not have been further from the religious purity of Jerusalem, the heart of the country. Yet that is where Jesus began, not from the centre but from the periphery, and he did so in order to tell us too that no one is far from God's heart. Everyone can receive his word and encounter him in person. The Gospel offers a nice detail in this regard, when it tells us that Jesus' preaching came "after" that of John (Mk 1:14). That word after is decisive: it points to a difference. John received people in the desert, where only those able to leave their homes could go. Jesus, on the other hand, speaks of God in the heart of society, to everyone, wherever they find themselves. He does not speak at fixed times or places, but "walking along the shore", to fishermen who were "casting their nets" (v. 16). He speaks to people in the most ordinary times and places. Here we see the universal power of the word of God to reach everyone and every area of life.

Yet the word of God also has particular power, that is, it can touch each person directly. The disciples would never forget the words they heard that day on the shore of the lake, by their boats, in the company of their family members and fellow workers: words that marked their lives forever. Jesus said to them: "Follow me, I will make you become fishers of

men” (v. 17). He did not appeal to them using lofty words and ideas, but spoke to their lives. He told fishermen that they were to be fishers of men. If he had told them: “Follow me, I will make you Apostles, you will be sent into the world to preach the Gospel in the power of the Spirit; you will be killed, but you will become saints”, we can be sure that Peter and Andrew would have answered: “Thanks, but we’ll stick to our nets and our boats!” But Jesus spoke to them in terms of their own livelihood: “You are fishermen, and you will become fishers of men”. Struck by those words, they come to realize that lowering their nets for fish was too little, whereas putting out into the deep in response to the word of Jesus was the secret of true joy. The Lord does the same with us: he looks for us where we are, he loves us as we are, and he patiently walks by our side. As he did with those fishermen, he waits for us on the shore of our life. With his word, he wants to change us, to invite us to live fuller lives and to put out into the deep together with him.

So dear brothers and sisters, let us not ignore God’s word. It is a love letter, written to us by the One who knows us best. In reading it, we again hear his voice, see his face and receive his Spirit. That word brings us close to God. Let us not keep it at arm’s length, but carry it with us always, in our pocket, on our phone. Let us give it a worthy place in our homes. Let us set the Gospel in a place where we can remember to open it daily, perhaps at the beginning and at the end of the day, so that amid all those words that ring in our ears, there may also be a few

verses of the word of God that can touch our hearts. To be able to do this, let us ask the Lord for the strength to turn off the television and open the Bible, to turn off our cell phone and open the Gospel. During this liturgical year, we are reading Saint Mark, the simplest and the shortest of the Gospels. Why not read it at home too, even a brief passage each day. It will make us feel God's closeness to us and fill us with courage as we make our way through life.

May the Virgin Mary always go before us on this journey; let us be guided and accompanied by her.

