

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by
Fr. Tom

Last week, we began our discussion of listening to God by reading His Word. We also discussed how to begin reading the Bible, answering the question, “Where do I start?” Hopefully, you followed my suggestion to pick up a Bible and begin reading.

Now, it is time to move to the next question, “What does it mean?” There are many ways to answer this question. I would like to highlight three methods of Scripture reflection and study by using this week’s Gospel, Mark’s version of the Last Supper [MK 14:12-16, 22-26]. The first method is simply to spend some quiet time in contemplation of a particular Scripture. For example, in the Gospel you will read that Jesus offered bread to His disciples and said, “Take it: this is my body.” What does that mean to you? How is Jesus feeding them? How is Jesus offering His Body for them to eat? What thoughts does this Scripture call to your own mind? Do you think about the Eucharist that you will receive at Mass?

Some people will want to go deeper into understanding the Scripture, and ensuring that they are thinking correctly about the passage. In these moments, you may want to consult some critical analyses of Scripture. A good Catholic study Bible or annotated Bible, such as *The Catholic Study Bible* by Oxford Press, is a great first step for this type of study. For more detailed analysis of particular Scriptures, there are many other books, such as *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, a rather heady (and heavy) academic book, but with great detailed insights. Finally, you may wish to get a book to further your understanding of the culture of the time. For example, in my own Scripture reflection and homily preparation, I will often refer to

The Cultural World of Jesus by John J. Pilch, which is a three-volume series on the Sunday readings. In his chapter on today’s Corpus Christi readings, Pilch discusses the importance of the meal to First Century Jews.

Finally, I would like to highlight a good method of Scripture contemplation that comes from our Catholic tradition, specifically from St. Ignatius and the Jesuits. This method is particularly helpful for the Gospels and other narrative books of the Bible. Using Ignatian contemplation, we imagine ourselves actually in the story. We might be one of the characters mentioned or even a bystander. We use all our senses to immerse ourselves in the story. For example, if we were present at the Last Supper, what would the bread taste like? How does the meal smell to you? What clothes are you wearing and how do they feel? After inserting yourself into the scene, begin to imagine your feelings as you partake in this moment. What would you understand when Jesus tells you, “Take it; this [bread] is my body”? How do you feel about the things Jesus is saying to you, as one of the disciples? Would you have any questions for Jesus? In this method of contemplation, you can even ask those questions, and imagine Jesus’ answers. Enter into dialogue with Jesus and the other disciples. When you have finished your contemplation, think about what you might have learned and what God is telling you, based on this Scripture.

During this week, try one of these methods of Scripture study and reflection. Use the Gospel mentioned above or another Scripture reading. Next week, we will discuss other ways that we can listen to God in our lives and in our prayer.

