



Brief Patristic Messages



The Study of Holy Scripture

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."
(Colossians 3:16)*

*† His Eminence, Metropolitan
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

OUR PIOUS lay brethren in Christ should not forget and neglect a very beneficial gift of God's compassion for their spiritual edification: the study of Holy Scripture.

Assuredly, it is possible for one to study Holy Scripture, but certain questions arise: Does the "*word of Christ*" abide in such a student "*richly*"? Is this so each time that he studies it? Does he know Holy Scripture sufficiently? Is it a shining guide and arbiter of his life? Do the Sacred Texts have power and influence over his inner world, his *heart*?

The Holy Fathers advise us to undertake the unceasing and pious reading of the Holy Scriptures in such a way that this continual effort may familiarize our *hearts* with the teaching of Christ and that our *minds* might be literally *bathed* in it: then our actions will more easily and more naturally come into concord with the Gospel.

In this vein, let us note that Saint Pachomios the Great, the very Father of coenobitic monasticism, knew the Holy Gospel by heart and, prompted by Divine Revelation, imposed on his disci-

ples the duty of memorizing the Gospel, so that it would always accompany and guide them.

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SPECIAL CARE must be taken, so that the Book of Life is not read merely intellectually, for “*lofty flights*,” or out of curiosity and simply to gain knowledge: we are required to read Holy Scripture with our actions, by putting them into practice, so that its Life becomes our life.

We shall understand this better when we take heed of the following truth, one so simple but so profound: The New Testament begins with the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, which directs us to the “*practice*” and keeping of the Commandments, and it concludes with St. John the Theologian, who guides those who have been purified by “*practice*” to union with our Lord, to “mystical vision” [“*theoria*”].

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BUT LET no one think that the study of the “*word of Christ*” is an easy undertaking, or that it is achieved by our own mental skills: prayer, with a spirit of contrition and humility, is indispensable in order that the Divine Comforter might open the eyes of our souls and that the Divine Truths might be *revealed* to us.

Likewise, insofar as the interpretation of the Divine Texts is a gift of the Holy Spirit, we ought sedulously to avoid our own “*easy*” and subjective interpretations and have recourse with confidence and reverence to the hermeneutical perspectives of the Holy Fathers of our Church.

It should also not escape our notice that in Holy Scripture there is nothing insignificant and unworthy of attention; on the contrary, everything in it radiates the Light of Grace, and, consequently, it should be studied with much reverence, attentiveness, and dedication.

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THE GOD-BEARING Teachers of our Faith advise pious Christians to study the Holy Gospel standing, out of respect for the Sacred Words. In the event, however, that someone studies the Divine Word kneeling or sitting down-and this by condescension-, then reverence, fear of God, compunction, and attentiveness should dominate his soul.

Saint John Chrysostomos preserves for us an astonishing example of reverence towards the Sacred Books of our Holy Faith: The Christians of his age had a custom, when they were about to read any Sacred Book, of first washing their hands and then taking up the Book; and men read it with their heads uncovered, while women covered their heads...!

“We immediately brace ourselves and wash our hands, when we wish to take up a Book. Do you see how much reverence there is before the reading? And a woman, even if her head is uncovered, at once puts on her kerchief, displaying a sign of her inward piety; and a man, if he has his head covered, bares his head. Do you see how the outward clothing becomes a herald of inward piety?”

Hence, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*”: from the simpler to the more complex; from “*action*” to “*vision*”; with attention and reverence; and with the God-Bearing Fathers as guides.

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