

ST. PAUL CENTER FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

BREAKING THE BREAD

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ST. PAUL CENTER FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

A non-profit educational and research institute for promoting life-transforming study of Sacred Scripture in the Catholic tradition.

ADDRESS

2228 Sunset Blvd
Suite 2A
Steubenville, Ohio 43952

PHONE

(740) 264-9535

FAX

(740) 264-7908

EMAIL

office@salvationhistory.com

WEBSITE

www.salvationhistory.com

Word Association

By Dr. Scott Hahn

Christmas came early for me in 2010. My biggest present arrived, date-stamped from the Vatican, in my email in mid-November. It was Pope Benedict's new missive, the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* ("The Word of the Lord") — the most important magisterial document on Sacred Scripture in nearly half a century.

The Word of God is Pope Benedict's highest priority, as he recently set it out for the world's bishops: "Leading men and women to...the God who speaks in the Bible: this is the supreme and fundamental priority of the Church and of the Successor of Peter at the present time."

And you can see that commitment in *Verbum Domini*.

The text is huge — over 200 pages! — but I devoured it at once. And the more I read, the more excited I was to read more. It seems that on every page the Holy Father was affirming the work that you and I have been doing through the St. Paul Center. He noted that the Bible's proper "home" is in the Church, and particularly in the liturgy. Haven't we, for almost a decade, been urging people to "read the Bible from the heart of the Church" — meaning the Eucharistic heart?

He spoke of the unity of the whole Bible, Old Testament and New, and how that unity manifests itself through "typology" — the Old foreshadowing the New, and the New fulfilling the Old, according to God's pattern for history? He spoke of the importance of the Bible's historical truth. We've been saying all along that "critical" scholarship, properly used, does not invalidate the interpretations of the Fathers or the great doctors of the Middle Ages. It enhances them. He spoke also of consistency and development in the Church's major statements on Sacred Scripture — especially the papal encyclicals. This, too, is what we've been emphasizing, against those who say that later popes contradict the earlier popes. If we follow the lead of the Vicar of Christ, we stay on a course "prudent and balanced" with our biblical studies.

By the time I got to article 75, I felt as if I'd been reading the St. Paul Center's mission statement. But all that was ribbons and wrapping compared to what came next. The Holy Father dreamed aloud about "specialized institutes for biblical studies" that would provide formation for clergy and laity alike, passing on a completely biblical and completely Catholic way "to understand, live and proclaim the word of God." Such formation, he said, is what "all Christians, and catechists in particular, need." Reading *Verbum Domini*, I felt, on every page, as if His Holiness and I were singing from the same hymnal. But that's not it. We were reading from the same Bible — the book where we find Jesus speaking through the New Testament writers to the whole Church — in the first century and the twenty-first.

What is it that we do at the St. Paul Center? Our mission is simple: Reading the Bible from the heart of the Church. You and I work together to promote "biblical literacy for all lay Catholics, and biblical fluency for clergy and teachers." When I met with Pope Benedict last summer, he affirmed our work in person. *Verbum Domini* confirms that the methods we promote are indeed the Catholic way to read the Bible — always from the heart of the Church.

My prayer is that you and I will always be faithful to the way, and that we'll heed the pontiff's commission set forth so beautifully and clearly in *Verbum Domini*. Let's make that our New Year's resolution and our prayer for 2010.



BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNDAY MASS READINGS

A KING TO BEHOLD

January 2, The Feast of the Epiphany
Isaiah 60:1-6 Psalm 72:12,7-8, 10-13
Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6 Matthew 2:1-12

An “epiphany” is an appearance. In today’s readings, with their rising stars, splendid lights and mysteries revealed, the face of the child born on Christmas day appears.

Herod, in today’s Gospel, asks the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah is to be born. The answer Matthew puts on their lips says much more, combining two strands of Old Testament promise — one revealing the Messiah to be from the line of David (see 2 Sam 2:5), the other predicting “a ruler of Israel” who will “shepherd his flock” and whose “greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth” (see Mic 5:1-3).

Those promises of Israel’s king ruling the nations resound also in today’s Psalm. The psalm celebrates David’s son, Solomon. His kingdom, we sing, will stretch “to the ends of the earth,” and the world’s kings will pay Him homage. That’s the scene too in today’s First Reading, as nations stream from the East, bearing “gold and frankincense” for Israel’s king.

The Magi’s pilgrimage in today’s Gospel marks the fulfillment of God’s promises. The Magi, probably Persian astrologers, are following the star that Balaam predicted would rise along with the ruler’s staff over the house of Jacob (see Num 24:17).

Laden with gold and spices, their journey evokes those made to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba and the “kings of the earth” (see 1 Kgs 10:2,25; 2 Chron 9:24). Interestingly, the only other places where frankincense and myrrh are mentioned together are in songs about Solomon (see Songs 3:6, 4:6,14).

One greater than Solomon is here (see Luke 11:31). He has come to reveal that all peoples are “co-heirs” of the royal family of Israel, as today’s Epistle teaches.

His manifestation forces us to choose: Will we follow the signs that lead to Him as the wise Magi did? Or will we be like those priests and the scribes who let God’s words of promise become dead letters on an ancient page?

ANOINTED ONES

January 9, The Baptism of the Lord
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10
Acts 10:34-38 Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus presents himself for John’s baptism in today’s Gospel — not because He is a sinner, but in obedience to God’s design. He humbles himself, to take on the appearance of a sinner, so that we might be made righteous for God (see 2 Cor 5:21). His baptism reveals that He is the Christ (literally, “anointed one”) — the Spirit-endowed Servant promised by Isaiah in today’s First Reading.

And his baptism marks the start of a new world, a new creation. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, reminding us of the Spirit that hovered like a dove over the face of the deep in creation (see Gen 1:2). As in the beginning, at the Jordan the Lord’s majestic voice thunders above the waters.

As Peter preaches in today’s Second Reading, this baptism is a royal and priestly anointing. Through his anointing, Jesus is given the Holy Spirit and power to fight the power of devil.

He is revealed to be the fulfillment of God’s preparations throughout Israel’s history. He is “beloved” given to Abraham (see Gen 22:2,12,26), and God’s “first-born son,” which is what He called Israel (see Exod 4:22-23). He is the divine son begotten by God, the everlasting heir promised to King David (see Psalm 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14). And he is, as Isaiah says today, “a covenant of the people [Israel]” and “a light to the nations.”

By his baptism he sanctified the waters of the Jordan and our baptismal waters. He opened the heavens to us and made it possible for the Spirit to be poured out upon us. In baptism, we are anointed with that same Spirit, made beloved sons and daughters of God. Indeed, this is the meaning of Christians — literally “anointed ones.”

We are the “sons of God” in today’s Psalm — called to give glory to His name in His Temple. Let us pray that we always remain faithful to our calling as His children, that our Father might call us what he calls His Son—“my beloved...in whom I am well pleased.”

PERFECT OFFERING

January 16, 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 49:3,5-6 Psalm 40:2,4,7-10
1 Corinthians 1:1-3 John 1:29-34

Jesus speaks through the prophet Isaiah in today’s First Reading.

He tells us of the mission given to Him by the Father from the womb: “You are My servant,’ He said to Me.”

Servant and Son, our Lord was sent to lead a new exodus — to raise up the exiled tribes of Israel, to gather and restore them to God. More than that, He was to be a light to the nations, that God’s salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (see Acts 13:46-47).

Before the first exodus, a lamb was offered in sacrifice and its blood painted on the Israelites’ door posts. The blood of the lamb identified their homes and the Lord “passed over” these in executing judgment on the Egyptians (see Ex 12:1-23,27).

In the new exodus, Jesus is the “Lamb of God,” as John beholds Him in the Gospel today (see 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Our Lord sings of this in today’s Psalm. He has come, He says, to offer His body to do the will of God (see Heb 10:3-13).

The sacrifices, oblations, holocausts, and sin-offerings given after the first exodus had no power to take away sins (see Heb 10:4). They were meant not to save but to teach (see Gal 3:24). In offering these sacrifices, the people were to learn self-sacrifice — that they were made for worship, to offer themselves freely to God and to delight in His will.

Only Jesus could make that perfect offering of himself. And through His sacrifice, He has given us ears open to obedience, made it possible for us to hear the Father’s call to holiness, as Paul says in today’s Epistle.

He has made us children of God, baptized in the blood of the Lamb (see Rev 7:14). And we are to join our sacrifice to His, to offer our bodies — our lives — as living sacrifices in the spiritual worship of the Mass (see Rom 12:1).

HISTORY REDEEMED

January 23, 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 8:23-9:3 Psalm 27:1,4,13-14

1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17 Matthew 4:12-23

Today's Liturgy gives us a lesson in ancient Israelite geography and history.

Isaiah's prophecy in today's First Reading is quoted by Matthew in today's Gospel. Both intend to recall the apparent fall of the everlasting kingdom promised to David (see 2 Sam 7:12-13; Psalm 89; Psalm 132:11-12).

Eight centuries before Christ, that part of the kingdom where the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali lived was attacked by the Assyrians and the tribes were hauled off into captivity (see 2 Kgs 15:29; 1 Chron 5:26).

It marked the beginning of the kingdom's end. It finally crumbled in the sixth century B.C., when Jerusalem was seized by Babylon and the remaining tribes were driven into exile (see 2 Kgs 24:14).

Isaiah prophesied that Zebulun and Naphtali, the lands first to be degraded, would be the first to see the light of God's salvation. Jesus today fulfills that prophecy — announcing the restoration of David's kingdom at precisely the spot where the kingdom began to fall.

His gospel of the Kingdom includes not only the twelve tribes of Israel but all the nations — symbolized by the "Galilee of the Nations." Calling His first disciples, two fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, He appoints them to be "fishers of men" — gathering people from the ends of the earth.

They are to preach the gospel, Paul says in today's Epistle, to unite all peoples in the same mind and in the same purpose — in a worldwide kingdom of God.

By their preaching, Isaiah's promise has been delivered. A world in darkness has seen the light. The yoke of slavery and sin, borne by humanity since time began, has been smashed.

And we are able now, as we sing in today's Psalm, to dwell in the house of the Lord, to worship Him in the land of the living.

THE BLESSED PATH

January 30, 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 Psalm 146:6-10

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 Matthew 5:1-12

In the readings since Christmas, Jesus has been revealed as the new royal son of David and Son of God. He is sent to lead a new exodus that brings Israel out of captivity to the nations and brings all the nations to God.

As Moses led Israel from Egypt through the sea to give them God's law on Mount Sinai, Jesus too has passed through the waters in baptism. Now, in today's Gospel, He goes to the mountain to proclaim a new law — the law of His Kingdom.

The Beatitudes mark the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham — that through his descendants all the nations of the world would receive God's blessings (see Gen 12:3; 22:18).

Jesus is the son of Abraham (see Matt 1:1). And through the wisdom He speaks today, He bestows the Father's blessings upon "the poor in spirit."

God has chosen to bless the weak and lowly, those foolish and despised in the eyes of the world, Paul says in today's Epistle. The poor in spirit are those who know that nothing they do can merit God's mercy and grace. These are the humble remnant in today's First Reading — taught to seek refuge in the name of the Lord.

The Beatitudes reveal the divine path and purpose for our lives. All our striving should be for these virtues — to be poor in spirit; meek and clean of heart; merciful and makers of peace; seekers of the righteousness that comes from living by the law of Kingdom.

The path the Lord sets before us today is one of trials and persecution. But He promises comfort in our mourning and a great reward.

The Kingdom we have inherited is no earthly territory, but the promised land of heaven. It is Zion where the Lord reigns forever. And, as we sing in today's Psalm, its blessings are for those whose hope is in the Lord.

Mass for Conversions

Every morning, the staff of the St. Paul Center prays a special novena to St. Paul for our work, intentions, and the intentions of our donors and friends. With the coming Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, celebrated on January 25, we invite you to join us in the novena throughout the month of January.

We also invite you to use the enclosed reply card to send us the names of all your friends and family who have left the Catholic Church. On the feast that celebrates Paul's dramatic conversion from an enemy of the Church to its greatest defender, we will remember them at a special Mass and ask God to give them the grace of conversion. We'll also include prayers for their return to the Church in our daily novena.

Novena to St. Paul the Apostle

Entrust your intentions to St. Paul and offer the following prayer:

O St. Paul the Apostle, preacher of truth and Doctor of the Gentiles, intercede for us to God who chose you.

You are a vessel of election, O St. Paul the Apostle, preacher of truth to the whole world.

O God, you have instructed many nations through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Paul. Let the power of his intercession with you help us who venerate his memory this day.

Conclude with one *Our Father*,
Hail Mary, and *Glory Be*.

Fullness of Truth Conference Announced: “Thy Kingdom Come”

It's the Kingdom to which you belong. It's the Kingdom Jesus established. And it's the Kingdom that you'll be hearing about every Sunday this year.

Starting Advent 2010, the Church will shine a spotlight on the Gospel of Matthew as she returns to the readings for Liturgical Year A. To help you get the most out of what you'll be hearing at Mass in the coming months, this year's Fullness of Truth Conference will likewise shine a light on Matthew's words.

Held in Dallas, Texas on Saturday, April 30, and Sunday, May 1, 2011, “Thy Kingdom Come: The Gospel of Matthew” will look at why, of all the Gospel writers, Matthew focused the most profoundly on Jesus' promises of a Kingdom.

With the help of Dr. Scott Hahn, Dr. Michael Barber, and Dr. John Bergsma, you'll explore the relationship between King David and Jesus, the importance of the Sermon on the Mount to believers today, and what Jesus meant by giving the keys of the Kingdom to Peter. You'll also grow in your understanding of what your role in the Kingdom is supposed to be, as well as what the Church in heaven has to do with the life and worship of your local parish. For more information or to register, visit www.SalvationHistory.com.



Fathers and Doctors of the Church Pilgrimage: November 2010



St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Peter Chrysologus. These early Christian saints were among the first and greatest of the Church's teachers. And this November, you're invited to join the St. Paul Center on a special pilgrimage to where they lived, taught, and died.

From November 10-19, 2011, St. Paul Center Vice President and renowned early Church historian Mike Aquilina will lead a select group of pilgrims to the Christian holy sites in Milan, Pavia, Ravenna, Assisi, and Rome. Joining him will be St. Paul Center research fellow Steve Ray, Catholic author and radio host Dr. Matt Bunson, and Catholic art historian Elizabeth Lev.

Over the course of nine days, the St. Paul Center team will take you on a journey back in time, exploring the world of the Church Fathers. We'll pray at the tombs of

Ambrose and Augustine, visit the former seat of Peter Chrysologus, and offer Mass where the martyrs' blood ran. We'll also make a stop in Assisi to pay tribute to the great teacher of poverty and humility, St. Francis. In Rome, we'll pray at the tombs of the Apostles and explore the city that the Church inherited from the empire.

Together we'll learn about the historical and theological significance of some of Italy's greatest churches and works of art. We'll also explore the lives of the Fathers through daily lectures and informal discussions. Mass will be offered each day, and there will be ample free time for shopping, fellowship, and exploring the holy cities of the ancient Roman world.

Space is limited for this once-in-a-lifetime guided tour through the life and times of the Church Fathers. For more information or to register, contact Corporate Travel at 1-800-727-1999 or visit www.SalvationHistory.com.



St. Ambrose