



Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

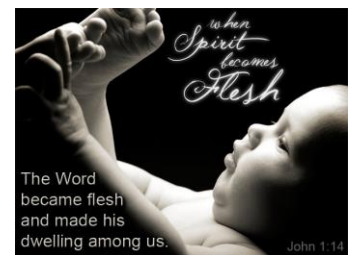
Sunday 3rd Jan 2021

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Jn 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through Him. What has come into being in Him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light. He was to bear witness to the light. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; He was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through Him, and the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own and His own people did not accept Him. But to those who did accept Him He gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in His name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God Himself. The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw His glory, the glory that He has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to Him. He proclaims, 'This is the one of whom I said, "He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because He existed before me."' Indeed, from His fullness we have, all of us, received – grace upon grace, for the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known.



A Short Thought

I've heard it said that this first chapter of John's Gospel has inspired more theological writing than any other chapter of the Bible. I'm not surprised. John's Gospel begins with powerful words that make us think about who God is and what God is up to in the person of Jesus Christ. Good words. Strong words. Poetic words. Words that are beautiful, but also words that can be difficult to pin down. Christmas is about light in the darkness. As St. John says, "The light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it." There is a kind of defiance to the light. It lives in the darkness but the darkness cannot overcome it.

It is not a simple piece of Scripture. I struggle with these words because they don't say what I want them to say. I want them to declare, especially in these times, that when the light comes into the world it overcomes, it obliterates the darkness. It takes away the bleakness of every sadness, every despair, every raw deal, every horrendous tragedy, every evil plan, every god-awful, life-sucking disease, and tosses the whole mess into the cosmic trash bin. I want the light to arrive and to win, and I want it to win big. I mean I want the light to deal with the darkness in a way that is so overwhelming, so completely devastating, that I never have to think about it again. Instead of total victory, we get something much more "modest" in John's Gospel. The light came into the world, and the darkness that was in the world did not, could not and cannot extinguish the light. But neither did the light wipe out the darkness. Over the course of this pandemic we have used the candle to symbolise so many things. Being light in the darkness is what the candles that burn in our windows symbolize. They are far more than seasonal decorations. They are;

- candles of unity in adversity, appreciation in uncertainty
- candles of hope in the midst of despair

- candles of remembrance and solidarity in grief
- candles of peace in places of discord and violence
- candles of joy where there is sadness
- candles of courage to ease all fear
- candles of love in the presence of hatred. - Each, a light in darkness.

As I think about those window candles, those little bits of light in the darkness, and as we enter this year still with uncertainty, I am grateful for so many people in our community like yourselves who day after day, not just on Christmas - are light in the darkness. You are a light in the darkness when you widen the circle of your comfort zone. You are a light in the darkness when you reach out to friends, family or stranger. You are a light in the darkness when you have the safety and needs of others to the forefront. You are a light in the darkness when you strive for right relationships. You are a light in the darkness when you promote non-violence. You are a light in the darkness when you risk being marginalized. You are a light in the darkness when you generously share of your time, talent and treasure. You are proof that a candle in the window of a community, or a parish is a promise of a warm and loving welcome into a circle of friends. You are proof that a candle in the window of your heart is a promise of light shining in darkness. The broken world waits in darkness for the Light that is you!

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- This, the Prologue, is a powerful opening to John's Gospel, a type of musical overture with trumpets and drums, anticipating the major themes that will recur throughout the story of Jesus. Consider reading it out loud, then come back and dwell on one sentence or phrase that resonates with you.
- "The Word was God" – this is the central truth about Jesus in the Gospels. In one word, the only Son who is close to the Father's heart has made him known: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). To all who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God. What does it mean to be 'A child of God'?
- As we start a New year set aside some time this week to reflect back on how the light of God's presence has impacted on your life during this past year. Give thanks for all that you have received from God directly and through the gift of other people. What small resolutions can you make to deepen your relationship with God and heal those relationships with others that need healing?

Prayer

Caring and compassionate God, too often I can fear the emptiness, the darkness, the silence within me. Yet it is there that the Spirit lives and moves, working even when my prayers seem most arid. Lord, help me to go daily into the quiet of my own heart, to meet you there, in love and adoration. Amen

Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

