The Bible: Talk 1

We’ve all heard the expression: There’s nothing new under the sun. It comes from Ecclesiastes: What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.

Technology may have changed over the millennia but human nature stays the same. Every kind of drama is played out in the pages of the bible—hate, greed, envy, lust, treachery, betrayal, rape, death, disobedience, temptation by the devil, to name a few. But it’s not all negative. The bible also highlights love, honor, respect, dignity, life, obedience, friendship, goodness, hope, compassion, mercy, joy, forgiveness, and ultimately, salvation. (Fr. Pollard: I’m going to make these lists parallel so that they correspond.)

**Why read the Bible?**

God speaks to us in the Bible. He reveals himself through Scripture. In the Old Testament he reveals himself as the Father and provides us with the commandments; he is Jesus the Son in the Gospels and brings the good news, establishes the Church, and reveals his plan for salvation; and then God sends the Holy Spirit to be the soul of the church, his guiding presence on earth. As we heard last Sunday in mass, St. Paul stated in Timothy 3:15, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

So, let’s consider training in righteousness. We are called to be good and to do good. But it’s something we have to work at. In modern life, we seek out experts to help us get things done that we don’t know how to do or simply can’t do. According to Fr. John Riccardo, God is the author of life, and as such, he’s the expert. So, we should turn to him. And one way to do that is through the bible where God reveals his wisdom, his love, and his mercy.

Peter Kreeft, a noted Catholic apologist and professor (who spoke to the diocese men’s conference last year and is speaking to the women’s conference this year) wrote a great book called *You Can Understand the Bible*. Kreeft makes an amazing claim that the Bible is not just a book. It’s a world. And I agree. He also says that the Bible shows the true character of God. And this is something I find fascinating: he says that the Bible is like a mirror, it also shows you yourself.

**Where Do I Start?**

First, get a Bible. You can get it as a traditional book, online (an easy resource is [www.biblegateway.combib](http://www.biblegateway.com) ). An advantage to an online bible is that there are many versions. One of the best versions for Catholics is the Revised Standard Edition for Catholics, and you easily can look up specific words, quotes, or themes. Just a basic overview, the bible is divided into the Old Testament--which includes creation, the original covenant with God, and the world before Christ--and the New Testament which includes the Gospels or the story of the life of Christ, the lives of the Apostles and how they established the Church, and ends with Revelation, or the prophecy for the end days.

Another fascinating aspect of the Bible is how much of the Old Testament prefigures what happens in the New Testament. Just one of many examples is that it was prophesied in Psalm 41 that "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Psalms 41:9. Then at the Last Supper Jesus said, “And 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me - one who is eating with me.” Mark 14:17-18.

If you’ve never read the Bible, a good place to start is with the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Mark is the shortest. The Gospels are a really good way to jump in and really get to know the life of Jesus. Another of my favorites is the Book of Esther in the Old Testament. It’s the story of the Jewish holiday Purim. It has a strong female protagonist (especially nice considering that we are often accused of being too patriarchal) and it’s very readable. It even includes a beauty pageant. (Hint: Esther wins.) But it is an incredible story about the relationship between a beautiful young woman and her uncle (who is her father figure), and their devotion to saving the Jews who are about to be exterminated. Another good entry point is the Psalms. They’re poems and prayers, most of which were written by David, and they’re pretty accessible.

There’s also a great website developed by Scott Hahn that helps you to read the Bible as a series of covenants. It’s called the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology. It’s a great resource and it’s free. ([www.salvationhistory.com](http://www.salvationhistory.com))

Another option is Bible study. If anyone had told me three years ago that I would be part of a bible study group, I would have said they were insane. But I am in one with two other hockey moms, and we all really look forward to it. It’s a great way for me to be accountable for doing the reading, and I have learned so much. There are also excellent Bible study classes designed for a classroom setting and they include the Great Adventure and the Bible Timeline.

You can spend as much or as little time as you want with the Bible. Of course, the more time you spend, the more you’ll get out of it. And to once again quote Peter Kreeft, “You will never be the same.”

If you had told me three years ago that I would become passionate about the Bible, I would have said that you were crazy.