

The Bible – A Brief Introduction

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In the Catholic faith, there are seventy-three books of the Bible. Forty-six books make up the Old Testament and twenty seven comprise the New Testament, which include the four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Letters (Epistles) and Revelation, which speak of the end of time. Only sixty-six (seven less) are recognized by Christians, The seven books recognized only by Catholics are: Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), and Baruch.

It is the biggest selling book of all time, with six billion copies believed to be sold. Catholics use a few translations, including the New American Bible (NAB), which United States Catholics base their readings on. Other acceptable versions include Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New Jerusalem Bible and Douay Rheims.

The first five books of the Bible (Old Testament) are used by Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The first five books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They are commonly referred to in the Jewish faith as “The Torah”.

The Gospels comprise the first four books of the New Testament – Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. Gospels are Christ-centric, recalling the thirty-three years of Jesus’ life on Earth.

The Acts of the Apostles, read (as the first or second reading) during the weeks after Easter and up until Pentecost have long been considered (by many scholars) to be the fifth Gospel.

John and Matthew were Apostles. Luke, a Physician (who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles) was a key aide to Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 1:24), and Mark (called John Mark (see Acts 13:5)) was Peter’s chief aide.

There is a three year cycle for the reading of the Gospel at Mass. These cycles, labeled A, B, and C begin on the first Sunday of Advent and end with Christ the King. During these one-year cycles, passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke are read. John is used through all three years, usually for special occasions. We are currently in Cycle A.

John is the most spiritual of the Gospels. Luke has fifty percent more of Jesus’ parables than the other Gospels.

Three versions of the Passion are read in the corresponding year of Matthew, Mark and Luke on Palm Sunday. John’s account of the Passion is read every Good Friday.

Paul wrote thirteen books in the Bible. His opening exultation, “Grace and peace to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” is found in seven (2 Thessalonians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 1:3; and Romans 1:7) of his thirteen books and also is an approved greeting for the Priest to use at the beginning (Liturgical Greeting) of Mass.

Two verses from the “Hail Mary” (Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.) and (Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb) were taken from (Luke 1:28, and 41).

Mary speaks only seven times in the Bible. Joseph doesn’t speak at all. Mary’s silence allows her to listen to her Lord. Do we?

“Do whatever He tells you (John 2:5),” is one of those phrases (and one of my favorites), where she instructs the waiters at the wedding at Cana. She knows what they don’t know. He is Jesus.

So what does He tell us? Here are just a few. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15); Repent, and believe in the gospel. (Mark 1:15); Follow me (Mark 2:14); The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you (Mark 4:11); Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith (Mark 4:40); Do not be afraid; just have faith (Mark 5:36); Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid (Mark 6:50); You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition (Mark 7:8); You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do (Mark 8:33); If you can! Everything is possible to one who has faith (Mark 9:23); Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me (Mark 9:37); For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God (Mark 10:27) What do you want me to do for you (Mark 10:51); Have faith in God (Mark 11:22); all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours (Mark 11:22); When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions (Mark 11:25); Why are you testing me (Mark 12:15); You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Mark 12:30); my words will not pass away (Mark 13:31); Be watchful (Mark 13:33); Sit here while I pray (Mark 14:32); Father, all things are possible to you (Mark 14:36); Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

We see in (John 1:29) John the Baptist, upon seeing his cousin Jesus say, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We pray this during the Communion Rite at Mass during the breaking of the Bread.

John the Baptist’s mother was Elizabeth. We read in the visitation passage that “Mary went in haste to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1:39).” In the Annunciation passage, we read that Mary was told by God that “Elizabeth was pregnant (Luke 1:36).” “When Elizabeth greeted Mary, the infant leaped in her womb (Luke 1:41).” John the Baptist had already begun his work of announcing the Messiah.

We read in one of the parables of the Centurion, who tells Jesus, “that I am not worthy to have You enter under my roof” (Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6). He asks Jesus to “say the word and his servant will be healed.” We pray this right before Communion, when the Priest holds up the Body and Blood and recites, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive You, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”

There are one hundred and fifty Psalms.

Psalm 51 is the prayer of repentance – Have mercy on me, God, in Your goodness; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense. This could be a prayer you pray when the priest asks us to consider our sins during the Penitential Rite. Another one of my favorite verses is Psalm 51:12), “A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit. This verse changed my life. Every time we receive Penance, we receive a new heart and a spirit. Jesus is the best Doctor of them all!

(Luke 18:13) is another prayer you can pray at the Penitential Rite. I do every morning. "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."

There are thirty-one Proverbs. Can it be said that God gave us one for each day?

"The Lord is with you" can be found in seven places (Genesis 26:28-29; Judges 6:12; 2 Samuel 7:3; 2 Kings 10:23; 2 Chronicles 15:2; 2 Chronicles 20:17 (2x)) through the Old Testament and once in the New Testament (Luke 1:28).

When the Priest raises the Body and Blood of Jesus during consecration, it is more than appropriate to pray the words of the Apostle Thomas, "My Lord and My God! (John 20:28)."

We'll be delving into forgiveness in the coming weeks. Two verses that help me forgive are, "Father, forgive them, they not know what they do." – (Luke 23:34) and Peter asks Jesus about John, "What about him?" Jesus replies, "What concern is it of yours? You follow Me." – (John 21:21-22). Here, I am Peter and the '*him*' is the person I am mad at.

Finally, here are some verses I use when I enter Church and pray to Jesus. "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4), (Mark 9:5), & (Luke 9:33); "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" (Luke 17:13); "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" (Luke 18:38); "Lord, please let me see." (Luke 18:41); "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47); "Stay with us" (Luke 24:29); "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32); "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." (Luke 23:42); "Do not be afraid." (Luke 1:30); "In the beginning was Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1); "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that those who believe might not perish, but might have eternal life." (John 3:16);

I use these and many others in my everyday life too. I try and have a conversation with God every five minutes. I speak with him on average two hundred times a day.

"And they were continually in the temple praising God" - (Luke 24:53)