

Encouragement Encouragement

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Old or New ??

Already into the New Year and between and betwixt Advent and Lent, Christmastide and Easter so it is perhaps a good time to reflect on things old and new. Many people have a preference for the things they like, say furniture, decoration, events, old antique or modern and contemporary. In a curious kind of way this is also reflected in our attitudes to the most important old book – the Bible. This also is divided between what we call ‘the Old Testament and the New’. Old, here referring to the time before Jesus’ birth, and the New to the period from His birth to death, Resurrection and the activities of the Apostles and Disciples. We are familiar with the term Old Testament and the New Testament but should it be treated like furniture, with the usual preferences or even so divided that we lose the importance and significance of what is contained within either.

It is no wonder that such divisions arose. There was little knowledge of what was contained therein by vast numbers of people. The Bible itself was rarely available to all for centuries. The book was usually in Latin, so inaccessible. Before the printing presses did their work it was magnificently decorated but kept in one place and limited copies were made by hand. The Reformation led to a division in translation, and to many it became a forbidden book. This became an even deeper divide among Christians, shocking in itself, as churches were termed ‘bible-based’ or not, as the case may be. Although in reality the Bible was still used, both Old and New Testament, its usage was restricted to those times in services, Mass etc. Finally, when printed copies were freely available, a Bible was perhaps owned but not used in most Catholic households... Clearly there are exceptions, and countries, where this was not the case and these continued the tradition of reflecting on Scripture. However, in this country there is a legacy of not truly deepening our understanding and love of the Word, on which our Faith is based. Hopefully this is changing. While this is true of the New Testament, more strongly this is so in the Old, save for a few ‘stories’ taught to the young, such as Noah, ‘Daniel in the Lions’ Den’, Joseph and his coat, Samson and Delilah, and Moses and the Ten Commandments.

Yet, if this is our perception and understanding of the contents of the Old Testament, which in Jewish terms is known as the Torah, it is an impoverishment of the whole understanding of its relationship to the New Testament and its essential integrative history which tells of the relationship between God and His People.

It brings together the ‘old covenant’ and promise and shows us the ‘new covenant’ and Redemption. It is rather like trying to pretend a child born has no parents or history – no relationship with those who preceded it and those who will follow.

It is called a ‘testament’ for the word signifies truth – a witness to what happened and why. A testimony is a telling of an event or circumstance by a witness to that event. We talk of a testimonial match in memory of a player on the field, remembering his talents or capabilities. We speak of a last will and testament, a statement of intention. Yet do we ever consider why we speak of the Old Testament, or the New, in such terms?

The Old Testament, apart from being the history of the Jewish people (remembering that Mary and Joseph were Jewish) is an evolution of God’s attendance to His people and the love He has for His Creation. We see His care and leading ever closer to His purpose of making all things new – all things coming together in unity at the end of time. There is an abundance of evidence for the presence of God throughout the various and many books of the Bible. Each book contains another element of the burgeoning of God’s love and all pointing to both the need for and the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, to ultimately Redeem and save His people – in His Mercy.

Divided into sections we see the many people who walk through the pages, each having a part to play in the understanding of God and His influence on their lives. We see those whose life histories lead them to God and God’s people – people such as Abraham, Moses, Samuel. We see women such as Esther, Ruth, Hannah. We see the part played by Angels in the book of Tobit, and the Exodus. We see the rôle of the prophets who acted as pointers to the coming of Jesus and the... Kingdom of God, which is so clear in Isaiah, Ezekiel,

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“When you stop learning you will soon neglect what you already know” Book of Proverbs 19:27

Jeremiah and Elijah.

The histories are full of promise, and are full of the revealing of God to His people. His promise, the Old Covenant, is full of beauty, yet there is also much about failed and flawed humanity but also a pointer to the New.



Our Lady and St. Thomas' Church, Willington, Co. Durham,
Old and New Testament paintings.

We must not forget either the many prayers contained in the Psalms, songs of the cry of the heart of God's people. They reflect so much of the pain and suffering of 'man' in any age as well as the acknowledgement of God's love for us and our need to return that love.

But if you still have doubts about the Old Testament, then look no further than the verification in the New, the Gospels... The Magnificat (Mary's Song, taken from Hannah), and the Benedictus (Zachariah's song after the naming of John the Baptist), make a wondrous link. Most importantly Jesus Himself quotes from the Old Testament. At the beginning of His ministry He opened the scroll and read from the Prophet Isaiah, in the synagogue in Nazareth, a pointer to the Old leading to the New, that is Himself. (Luke 4:18-20). His reference to the Ten Commandments, 'sayings on divorce', and all the time not rejecting the old teachings but elaborating, explaining fully, their true significance.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish (destroy) the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil (complete)." Matthew 5: 17

His love was now to be revealed in its completeness. His life was the personification and the model of the Law, the Word of God, coming to fruition and completeness.

Jesus frequently quotes from the prophets to show a way forward and silence the tongues of the mockers and those so embedded in the rules and regulations of the past that they cannot take on board the liberation of the New.

If you find the Old Testament difficult – and there is much to learn – think why we have the reading of a

Psalm from the Old Testament at Mass, as well as a passage from Scripture; perhaps you could look that up in the Bible and discover its place and meaning. Or perhaps you could take a complete story like that of Joseph, son of Jacob. (Genesis Ch.37-50). You could also pick a Psalm, they are also found in the Prayer of the Church, Divine Office and Breviary, prayed by priests, religious and lay people alike.

Slowly, the words will speak to your heart and make a link between the Old and the New Testament – which in essence is one Testament.

Try it! (There are many helpful Bibles with explanations).
Halina Holman

Pope Francis...

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's Mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in Him. The Father, "rich in mercy" after having revealed his name to Moses as a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness has never ceased to show, *in various ways throughout history, His Divine nature.*

In the fullness of time when everything had been arranged according to His plan for salvation, He sent His only Son to reveal His love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father, Jesus of Nazareth, by His words, His actions, His entire person reveals the mystery of God.

Pope Francis 'The name God is Mercy' 2016

Prayer:

"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."
Numbers 6:24-26

Feast Days in February

1st St. Brigid

2nd Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas)

3rd St. Blaise

6th St. Paul Miki and Companions

8th St. Josephine Bakhita

10th St. Scholastica

11th Our Lady of Lourdes (World Prayer for the sick)

14th Ss. Cyril and Methodius

21st St. Peter Damien

22nd Chair of St. Peter, Apostle

28th St. David ...Lent starts tomorrow...