

PASTORAL LETTER

OF MOJSAJ.

HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP REDWOOD

FRANCIS

By the Grace of God and Favor of the Apostolic See Archbishop of Wellington and Metropolitan. To the Clergy and Faithful in the said Diocese. Health and Benediction in the Lord.

Dearly Beloved Brethren,

In our pilgrimage through life from time to eternity, we stand particularly in need of two things, food and light—food to sustain our strength, and light to guide our steps in the right way. Now, God's infinite mercy has admirably provided us with these two gifts, namely, our food in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, and our light in the Holy Bible, infallibly interpreted by the Church.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV., has chosen the occasion of St. Jerome's 15th centenary, to emphasise the exhortations of his predecessors, chiefly Pope Leo XIII., to bring back Bible-reading into prominence among the educated Catholics throughout the world. The occasion was most appropriate, because St. Jerome stands second to none of the Fathers as the champion of the Bible. His whole life was strenuously devoted to that one cause, nor did he spare either labor or sacrifice for its promotion. Born of Christian parents, he received the very best education in Greek and Latin literature available in his day. Hence his trenchant style and his rich vocabulary. No doubt in his youth he underrated the Sacred Scriptures in comparison with the elegance of his beloved classics, but, later on, more careful and extensive study of the Bible entirely changed his taste, and the love of Holy Writ became the most absorbing passion of his heart. Pope Damasus, of immortal memory, whose secretary St. Jerome had been for a period of two years, set him at his first most important biblical enterprise, namely, the correction of the old Latin version of the New Testament. After his illustrious patron's death, he left the Papal court and began to travel from school to school in different countries, in order to enrich his mind at every source of biblical scholarship. At last he settled permanently at Bethlehem, the very cradle of the Faith, and there spent the rest of his days in untiring labors on the text, the translation, and the exposition of the Sacred Scriptures.

Near the cave where Our Saviour was born, his vacant tomb may still be seen, while his relics are venerated at Rome, in the Basilica of Our Lady, styled "At the Crib."

St. Jerome was certainly a providential teacher, and Catholic schoolmen acclaim him a very great doctor, Doctor Maximus, because he is the very embodiment of Catholic tradition, regarding the Bible. His doctrine on the Canonicity of the Bible, its authority, its place in the scheme of Divine revelation, and the estimation in which it must be held by Christians, is beyond all praise.

The root-principle and starting-point for every dutiful and sincere reader and student of the Bible is, according to St. Jerome, this: the Bible is not, like other books, the common heritage of mankind, but the property of the Catholic Church, much in the same way as the deeds of an estate are the property of the owner. "No Church, no Bible," is an axiom. It was the Church that preserved with immense care the text and versions of the Old Testament, during the ages when very numerous treasures of ancient literature utterly perished; and, as regards the New Testament, the specific heritage of Christianity, we should not know, apart from the Church's certificate, either its authentic contents or the valid grounds for including or excluding particular documents. In the early ages of the Church, many so called "gospels" were in circulation, and also a number of epistles, besides those of St. Paul and the other Apostles. Who but the Church could infallibly fix the list or canon of the inspired books of the New Testament?

When, therefore, some modern self-styled scholar, or common reader, goes and buys a Bible from the bookseller, and proceeds to deal with it according to his fancy, he commits a most unscholarly solecism, and unscrupulously

violates the principle of St. Jerome. In that Saint's view ecclesiastical tradition is the basic law of all biblical study; and we read of him brushing aside some novel interpretation of a text with the curt remark, "the Church of God does not accept it." And we hear him declare that he did not deem it worth his while even to glance at a certain apocryphal book, for, he asks, "What is the use of reading what the Church rejects?" In this respect he perfectly agrees with the great doctor, St. Augustine, who forcibly asserts, "I would not credit the Gospel itself if it did not come to me on the authority of the Church."

The Church is the divinely appointed trustee of the Bible on behalf of mankind, and every Catholic scholar must enter on his biblical studies with loyal submission to the limitations of his critical liberty necessarily proscribed by the Church's infallible tradition. With these safeguarding limits he enjoys the most perfect freedom. Moreover, he is diverted from blind-alleys which lead nowhere, and is concentrated on fields of research sure to be most fruitful. The plain man who reads his Bible, like the flower-sucking bee, for the sweet sustenance to be extracted from it, is delivered from the nightmare of the higher criticism, and takes God's book with the infallible guarantee that he reads the words of light and life.

We exhort you, therefore, Dearly Beloved Brethren, to be diligent in Bible-reading. But you must know that it is largely an acquired taste, as both St. Jerome and St. Augustine tell us. They, too, needed training before they could appreciate it. "You must crack the nut before you eat it," was one of St. Jerome's epigrams. Nor can we use better words than his in this connection. To a devout lady he says, "Read constantly and memorise as much as you can. Read till sleep overtakes you, and your head droops softly upon the sacred page." To a priest: "Frequently read the Holy Scripture, nay, never let the hallowed volume out of your hand. Learn what you have to teach. Acquire the faithful word which is according to doctrine, that you may be able to exhort in sound doctrine, and to convince the gainsayers." To his spiritual daughters, Paula and Eustochium, at a time of social unrest very like the present, he expresses his world-weariness and its cure: "If there is anything to reconcile a thinking man to this life, and make its stirs and upheavals supportable, I really think the devout perusal of the Bible is that one thing." What rivetted him to this spiritual passion was the living image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His own personality, and in His Mystical Body, which seemed to shine out of the inspired page. "Not to know the Scriptures," he cried, "is not to know Christ. One thing and one thing only is the priceless pearl—the knowledge of Christ, the Sacrament of His Passion, the mystery of His Resurrection." It is an old calumny against the Catholic Church that she fears and hates the Bible, and does all she can to keep it a closed book, in fact, that Catholics are not allowed to read the Bible. The fact is that the Catholic Church surpasses all in the reverence which she pays to the Bible, and the zeal and care with which she promotes its study. Before the "reformers" began their nefarious work, the Catholic Church taught the people the Bible as no Protestant Church has ever done. The "reformers," instead of giving the people the Bible, took it from them. Pope Pius VI. (1778) wrote: "At a time when a great number of bad books are circulated among the unlearned, you judge exceedingly well that the faithful should be excited to the reading of the Bible, for this is the most abundant source which ought to be left open to everyone to draw from it purity of morals and of doctrine. This you have reasonably effected by publishing the Bible in the language of your country (viz. Italian) suitably to everyone's capacity." This letter has since been commonly printed at the beginning of popular editions of the Catholic Bible. Also Pope Pius VII. (1820) urged the English bishops to encourage their people to read the Bible, saying, "Nothing can be more useful, more consolatory, more animating, because the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the Bible) serve to confirm the faith; to support the hope, and to inflame the charity of the true Christian."

Last year the whole Catholic world celebrated in Rome the 15th centenary of the death of the great doctor, St.

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