

The Deacon's Corner by Deacon Ron Desmarais

Where is that in the Bible?

I'd like to talk about scripture. Now don't get turned off before I get a chance to explain. I realize that most Catholics think they don't know any scripture. If they mean that they can't quote chapter and verse then I would concede they aren't familiar enough to know where things are. However, I would disagree that they don't know scripture. Catholics are very familiar with scripture it's just that they don't realize it. If I said: Raising Lazarus, the Annunciation, the Beatitudes, walking on water and the Wedding at Cana just about any Catholic could tell me the general outline of the story. If I said Nicodemus some might be able to tell me he is in John chapter 5 or Eucharist they might be able to say John chapter 6. So I don't think Catholics have a problem with knowing the Bible. I think they just don't have a good understanding of where they can find it.

See so far it's not so bad, is it? Scripture isn't something that Catholics should be beating themselves up about. Do I think that Catholics could do a better job of trying to learn - Yes! But you have to understand a few things about the Bible and scripture. You see all that chapter and verse stuff is only a couple hundred years old. In fact, the Bible was not even broken up into chapters until the 1200's and that was by Stephen Cardinal Langton, later archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1228). It would be another 300 years before those chapters would be divided into verses. The first phase was in 1528 when Santes Pagnino, O.P., edited the first part of the Old Testament. The second phase was in 1551 when Robert Stephens published his Greek edition with verses. Every time you open your Bible and see the chapter and verse markers, you are being influenced by the work of the above three men, all Catholic by the way.

What drove these men to create chapters and then verse numbers? For over 1200 years people had been quoting scripture basically the same way I did at the beginning of this article by simply referring to a Bible passage and letting you recall it from your memory. However, as scripture study began to leave the confines of the church and enter the universities where it would be studied by theologians some more definitive way of referring to scripture was required. So chapter and verse was developed not for you and me in the pew, but to help scholars' reference passages of scripture.

The Church tells us where we can find the readings in Mass. We are told that the 1st reading is from the Book of Exodus or the Second reading is from the Epistle of Timothy or St. Paul to the Corinthians. The Gospels are all from Mathew, Mark, Luke and John so they are very easy to remember. But the major difference between the Gospels and the other readings is the Gospels have primacy of place due to being direct references to what Christ said and did.

However, when the Lector or the Deacon read the scripture passage for the day they only tell you which book of the Bible it comes from they never tell you the chapter and verse (although it is referenced). One reason for that is the readings for the most part are pretty much consecutive. The reading for this week will stop and the following week it will pick up from where we stopped the week before. Of course, there are exceptions to this like everything, but this is the general outline of the scripture readings as we know them.

The Sunday readings are on a three year cycle while the daily readings are on a two year cycle. So the first year (Cycle A) will be primarily from the Gospel of Mark, the next year from Matthew, and the third year from

Luke. The Gospel of John is then broken up and interspersed between the other three years. That is the general format for the three year cycle. Obviously the daily two year cycle has to be compressed but it is essentially the same format.

The structure for the Sunday readings also has the first readings coming from the Old Testament, the second reading coming from the Epistles or Letters of the New Testament. The Psalms speak for themselves, but are still in the Old Testament. And of course, the Gospel comes from the four Gospels in the New Testament.

If we didn't have missalettes at Mass we would have to bring our own Bible to Mass each week to follow the readings. We would then be using those little colored ribbons to mark our place for the following week. Only rarely would we have to skip around from one scripture reading to another when something would be out of the normal sequence.

So do you see how we HEAR scripture every day or at Sunday Mass but the chapter and verse are not used. This is because we don't really need them. Hmmm! Could that have something do to with why Catholics are not very familiar with quoting chapter and verse? As the saying goes, "You bet your sweet bippy!"

A lot of people say that Catholic's carry around a lot of guilt. I don't know if that is true or not, but I can say that Scripture is not something we have to feel sorry about.

I will say that if anyone is putting a guilt trip on Catholics it's the Protestants. Our problem is we have bought into THEIR strategy to undermine Catholicism, and sad to say many un-catechized Catholics have fallen prey to their wiles. Too often they will attack a Catholic with something from scripture quoting chapter and verse. This immediately places the Catholic on the defensive as he or she not being familiar with chapter and verse is already at a disadvantage. Without realizing that they

have a whole host of knowledge about scripture, but don't know how to formulate that into a response. If they do try to come back with a response the Protestant will come back and say, "Where is that in the Bible?" And of course, the Catholic can't come back with a response because they don't know where it is in the Bible. The Catholic now is starting to doubt them self, not realizing that the whole purpose of the exercise was to do just that.

The Protestant is normally quoting something out of context from the scripture because that is the way they have been trained to undermine a Catholic and bring him out of the Church. **First of all you shouldn't try and go one-on-one with someone like that.** If neither of you have a Bible with you just say, "I'll have to check it out." Then make an effort to find it and talk to them later about it. If you don't they will just come back and try again.

If they do have a Bible, ask them to look it up and show you. Read the passages before and after their quote. Often you can find a defense for your understanding of scripture because they are using it either narrowly or when placed in the context of the other passages doesn't really say that. This might not work in all cases, but it gives you time to get your thoughts together. As I said before you can always say, "I'll have to think about that." It's not a cop-out if you do think about it. *Then sign up for a CATHOLIC Bible study.*

Now having said all that I would like to say that there is no reason why we shouldn't use chapter and verse, after all, as I have told you it was developed by Catholics. And it does make it a lot easier to find passages in scripture. Don't let anyone undermine your faith, take the opportunity to build it up by studying scripture and most importantly your relationship with God by spending time with HIM the WORD made flesh.