

## The Bible should have a place in life outside of Mass

Bill Tammeus | Mar. 21, 2012 A small c catholic

"You know," the woman told me, "about the only exposure to the Bible most of us Catholics get is when we hear the weekly readings at Mass."

Clearly this disappointed her. Clearly she was hungry for more.

It was my duty and honor to provide an hour's worth of "more" for members of an adult education class [at her parish](#) [1] one recent Sunday morning. I came away from the experience both exhilarated and sad.

As I tried to unpack that day's lectionary readings for class members, I could sense a growing engagement with the texts. That day we spoke of the [Noahic Covenant](#) [2] in Genesis and talked about what covenant meant then and what it might mean for us now.

Drawing on New Testament texts, we spoke about baptism -- its use at the time of Jesus and how we think now about our own baptisms. And we spoke about what Jesus meant when he announced that the kingdom, or reign, of God was at hand, news he called the Gospel.

I brought along half a dozen different biblical translations and paraphrases and had class members read some passages aloud so they could grasp the idea that the word choices translators make in rendering the original Hebrew or Greek in English really matter, and that sometimes translators lead us astray while other times their choices provide brilliant new light.

Class members seemed quite engaged in all this conversation and began to ask questions and make comments.

Before I came to this parish I certainly was aware of the conventional wisdom that says Catholics in the pews don't do much Bible reading or Bible study outside of what they hear at worship, though I know Catholics for whom that is not true now and hasn't been true for decades.

But the woman's comment to me after the class told me that many Catholics still do not have the experience of deep study of scriptural texts in the way that is more common among us Protestants.

Indeed, my own Bible reading experience is not wildly unusual for Protestants. I hear scripture weekly at worship, yes, but I also belong to a small group that reads the Bible together weekly after breakfast and to another weekly luncheon group that does Bible study.

I've been part of both groups for more than 30 years. In addition, I participate in a weekly adult education class [at my church](#) [3] that seeks to unpack the scriptural passages that will be used in that week's worship service before we hear how the preacher uses them.

These opportunities to marinate in the word of God don't make me smarter or better than those who don't have such chances. But they do put me in touch with the reality that scripture reads me as much as I read it -- and that

the more it reads me, the more I can find my story within the stories in the Bible.

The Protestant pastor, author and theologian [Eugene Peterson](#) [4], in his *Eat This Book* [5], noted, "We don't read the Bible to get God into our world but to get ourselves into God's world." As Peterson says, when the Bible is properly ingested, it gets metabolized as cold cups of water for the thirsty and food for the hungry.

But none of that can happen if our Bibles remain on our coffee tables or, frankly, if our only exposure to God's word is in brief lectionary passages read at worship. We truly must inhale the Bible by working to understand its time, its place, its audience and the original meanings of its words as far as possible.

This will save us from being biblical literalists and, instead, let us take the Bible seriously. Besides, regular, in-depth Bible study can nourish us and challenge us in ways no other words can. I'm glad the woman who spoke to me has begun to see that.

[Bill Tammeus, a Presbyterian elder and former award-winning Faith columnist for *The Kansas City Star*, writes the daily "[Faith Matters](#)" blog [6] for *The Star's* website and a monthly column for *The Presbyterian Outlook*. His latest book, co-authored with Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust* [7]. Email him at wtammeus@kc.rr.com.]

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#### Links:

[1] <http://www.cure-of-ars.org/>

[2] [http://www.theopedia.com/Noahic\\_Covenant](http://www.theopedia.com/Noahic_Covenant)

[3] <http://www.secondpres.org>

[4] <http://www.eugenepetersononline.com/>

[5] [http://www.amazon.com/Eat-This-Book-Conversation-Spiritual/dp/0802864902/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1331151318&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Eat-This-Book-Conversation-Spiritual/dp/0802864902/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1331151318&sr=1-1)

[6] <http://billtammeus.typepad.com/>

[7] [http://www.amazon.com/They-Were-Just-People-Holocaust/dp/0826218601/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1299296756&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/They-Were-Just-People-Holocaust/dp/0826218601/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1299296756&sr=1-1)

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