

CENTRAL PROVINCE



CANDIDACY II

UNIT 5:

GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW

“JESUS SAW A MAN NAMED MATTHEW...HE SAID TO HIM, ‘FOLLOW ME.’ AND HE GOT UP AND FOLLOWED HIM.” (MATT. 9: 9)

The purpose of Candidacy II is more than *study*; it is *transformation* as a result of *study*. We take three months for each unit to afford us time to grow into a greater union with God. The painting on our titlepage is *The Calling of St. Matthew* by Caravaggio (1599) from the Contarelli Chapel in Rome. Jesus, accompanied by St. Peter, points to St. Matthew and says, “Follow me.” Matthew points to himself, as if to say, “Who, me?” Jesus, His feet already turning to leave, adds nothing after His invitation. Matthew immediately rises and commits himself to follow this Jesus. This is a real act of faith because Matthew, like Abraham, knows not where this will take him or what will be involved. He has taken the first step to transform his life from one of money and comfort to an unknown future of what – God only knows.

ST. DOMINIC

Although we do not follow Jesus physically, we do have the Gospel of Matthew, St. Dominic’s favorite Gospel. This has been chosen for this unit because St. Dominic carried it with him, read it over and over, even memorizing it. He carried this along with St. Paul’s Epistles and John Cassian’s *Conferences*. Sr. Diana Culbertson OP wrote on this for *St. Dominic’s Day 2010*:

“Matthew’s Gospel was St. Dominic’s favorite. He took it with him everywhere and how many times must he have prayed over that last chapter. When shortly after the foundation of the Order, he decided to disperse the brethren over all of Europe, he was cautioned not to take



such a risk. He made the announcement at a chapter meeting with the whole order present – all 16 of them. According to the record, when everyone protested, he replied, ‘I know what I am doing.’ This was not self-confidence. This was trust— trust in the promise of Jesus: ‘I am with you always...’ And so they left southern France, two by two. And not willingly.”

Thus, we can see that St. Dominic applied and followed the Gospel of Matthew in his life. It transformed him. A man or a woman is not born a saint but becomes one.

PRAYER

“...the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed.” (Dei Verbum, #19) In our quest to understand the Scriptures we should seek the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit before we read the Gospel of Matthew. A suggested traditional prayer is:



Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray. O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

“WHEN I FOUND YOUR WORDS, I DEVOURED THEM; THEY BECAME MY JOY AND THE HAPPINESS OF MY HEART.” (JER. 15: 16)

To get up and follow someone, to leave one’s life behind, as one knows and enjoys it, to turn our future over to another is a supreme act of faith, or even “foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1: 23). But we are assured that “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.” (1 Cor. 1: 25) There are people, not just canonized saints, who have read the Gospels and changed their lives. It can be done; witness Bobby Jindal: Bobby Jindal, Governor of Louisiana, grew up a devout Hindu. He completely reversed his life, leaving his religion, his culture and straining his family relationship after he began to read the Gospels:

“I began reading the Bible to disprove the Christian faith I was learning both to admire and despise. I cannot begin to describe my feelings when I first read the New Testament texts. I saw myself in many of the parables and felt as if the Bible had been written especially for me.” (*America Magazine*, 7/31/93)

In the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* (#1) we can reference Bobby Jindal’s former religion of Hinduism. A *Guru* is a spiritual teacher who has attained the spirituality he teaches. ‘He practices what he preaches.’ Hinduism teaches that we need a *Guru* to guide us on the path of perfection and union with God. In *Guru: The Spiritual Teacher* Dr. C. S. Shah writes:

“If we are fortunate enough to find such a Teacher, then a lofty kind of love can begin to bosom in our heart. Everything that happens between the Guru and the disciple happens through love and compassion. It is said in Indian religious lore, ‘If the disciple is ready, the Guru will appear; he will come to us.’ Intense yearning and effort to realize God is sure to help the aspirant find his or her Guru. Let us prepare ourselves to receive such a noble soul.”

Of course, we have found our *Divine Guru*, Jesus Christ. When you follow Jesus Christ, you know you are following God. He has appeared; are we ready?

LECTIO DIVINA

The important thing about reading the Bible is, simply, *to read it*. Begin by reading a small portion each day and after thirty days it will have become a habit. Then you will not ask, “Will I read it today but when?” Read something, a page, a paragraph, a sentence. You will honestly be surprised over time how much you will have read.

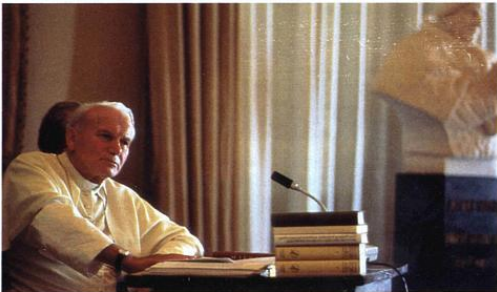
One of the ancient methods of reading the Bible is *Lectio Divina*. This practice goes back many centuries in the Church. It was cited in Unit 3: *Prayer, Initiate Formation, “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina”* by Fr. Luke Dysinger OSB (<http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>) The format is composed of four parts:

1. Lectio – Reading
2. Meditatio – Meditation
3. Oratio – Prayer
4. Contemplatio – Contemplation



Lectio Divina has been recommended by our last two Popes. Pope John Paul II counsels:

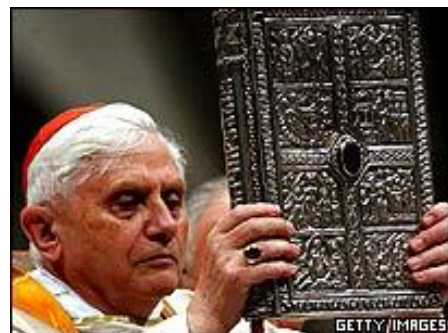
“It is especially necessary that the listening to the Word becomes an essential meeting, following the ancient and present-day tradition of *Lectio Divina*, enabling us to discover in the biblical text the living word that challenges us, directs us, that gives shape to our existence” (*Novo Millennio* # 39).



Source: Weltbild, 24, 18 November 1988, p. 27.

On Sept. 16, 2005 Pope Benedict XVI spoke the following words to 400 participants in the international congress on “*Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church*” at Castel Gandolfo:

“In this context, I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of ‘*Lectio divina*’:



‘the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart’ (*Dei Verbum*, #25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church -- I am convinced of it -- a new spiritual springtime.”

TO KNOW TRULY

You can see that there is much more to reading the Bible than simply reading it as one would a novel. We are trying to do more than reading words on a page as we



are trying to imprint the *Word* on our hearts. Action must be the end result and our actions must be transformed from what they have been. Truly to know the Gospel of Matthew, our task with this unit, will transform us and bring us into closer union with Jesus Christ.

“For one *knows truly* when one *understands* what one knows, when one *feels* what one has understood, and when one has *put into practice* what one has understood and felt.” (*Meditations on the Tarot*, p.343 [The two volume edition of this book appears on Pope John Paul II’s desk in the picture above, a gift of Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar])

As an example of this: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt. 5: 3) After giving this verse much study and thinking, how do you *understand* it? Now *feel* what you understand. This joins the heart to the mind and you move to a higher integrated plane with this verse. Now after closing the book how will you put this into *practice*? Each of us will answer differently but our being “poor in spirit” will affect our lives as our actions *must* be different. We will be different; we will be transformed and closer to Jesus, the author of these words. We will be challenged out of our comfortable existence into what? We do not know but God knows and wants us to be there – with Him.

OUTLINE

Although the purpose of Unit 5 is not 'Scripture Study', but rather an affective treatment resulting in transformation, a few words on the outline of St. Matthew's Gospel are in order for greater understanding. The following is adapted from *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, The Gospel According to Matthew*, by Benedict T. Viviano OP, p. 633:

- 1-4 a Narrative: Birth and Beginnings
- 5-7 b Sermon: Blessings, Entering the Kingdom
- 8-9 c Narrative: Authority and Invitation
- 10 d Sermon: Mission Discourse
- 11-12 e Narrative: Rejection by this Generation
- 13 f Sermon: Parables of the Kingdom
- 14-17 e¹ Narrative: Acknowledgement by Disciples
- 18 d¹ Sermon: Community Discourse
- 19-22 c¹ Narrative: Authority and Invitation
- 23-25 b¹ Sermon: Woes, Coming of the Kingdom
- 26-28 a¹ Narrative: Death and Rebirth

This outline is provided to the author by C. H. Lohr (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 23, 1961, p. 427). "It is based on the symmetry of ancient compositions and employs the concepts of *inclusion* or bracketing, chiasmus or criss-crossing of literary elements, and ring composition technique." (*NJBC*, p. 632) It illustrates the centrality of the theme of the 'Kingdom' in Jesus' message. His first public words were: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4: 17)

PARABLES

The use of parables by Jesus was an essential means He employed to get His message across to His audience. Sometimes they were employed so that only the few would understand and, then, only with explanation.

“Jesus used realistic images from daily life that caught his hearers’ attention by their vividness and narrative color. Yet his parables have a surprising twist; the realism is shattered and the hearers know that something more is at stake than a homey illustration to drive home a point. The parables raise questions, unsettle the complacent, and challenge the hearers to reflection and inquiry.” (NJBC, p. 1366)



The parable is contained within the text and the meaning can be lost as we continue to read. A good technique to counteract this is to read a number of parables together on a particular theme. Thus the message is reinforced. Since Jesus came to preach the ‘Kingdom’, let us examine some parables on this topic together. Draw your own conclusions after meditating upon some of these parables from Matthew’s Gospel regarding the ‘Kingdom’:

- The Sower 13: 1-9; 36-43
- The Weeds among the Wheat 13: 24-30
- The Mustard Seed 13: 31-32
- The Yeast 13:33
- The Buried Treasure 13: 44
- The Fine Pearl 13: 45-46
- The Thrown Net 13: 47-48
- The Unforgiving Servant 18: 23-35
- The Little Children 19: 13-15
- The Laborers in the Vineyard 20: 1-16
- The Two Sons 21: 28-30
- The Wedding Banquet 22: 2-14
- The Ten Bridesmaids 25: 1-13
- The Talents 25: 14-30
- The Judgement of the Nations 25: 31-46



**“WHERE DID THIS MAN GET ALL THIS?’ AND THEY TOOK OFFENSE AT HIM.”
(MATT. 13: 56-57)**

When we read the Gospel, we must not make the mistake many churches do: proclaiming only half the Gospel – the attractive half. We know and love the fact that Jesus rose from the dead; that He offered peace, joy and the promise of heaven to those who believe. But there is another side to the Gospel – one we often gloss over. These are the ‘Hard Sayings’ of Jesus which we must understand and take to heart. Sometimes we ‘spin’ these sayings away. These are difficult



but each of us must incorporate them meaningfully into our lives.

We are all familiar with the incident in John’s Gospel when Jesus said: “...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.” (Jo. 6: 53) “Then many of his disciples who were listening said, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’” (Jo. 6:60) “As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.” (Jo. 6: 66) Remember, these are His disciples John is writing about. We say, “But we do believe, so you are not writing about us.” True on this incident but what about other ‘hard sayings’? Do we no longer accompany Him?

St. Augustine commented on this passage from John in *Tractate 27, New Advent*:

“2. Many therefore, not of His enemies, but of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can hear it?’ If His disciples accounted this saying hard, what must His enemies have thought? And yet so it behooved that to be said which should not be understood by all. The secret of God ought to make men eagerly attentive, not hostile. But these men quickly departed from Him, while the Lord said such things: they did not believe Him to be saying something great, and covering some grace by these words; they understood just according to their wishes, and in the manner of men,

that Jesus was able, or was determined upon this, namely, to distribute the flesh with which the Word was clothed, piecemeal, as it were, to those that believe in Him. *'This,' say they, 'is a hard saying; who can hear it?'*"

'HARD SAYINGS'

Let us examine a few of these 'Hard Sayings' of Jesus:

- But I say to you whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement. (5:22)
- Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that *your brother has anything against you*, (italics mine) leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then offer your gift. (5:23-24)
- Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (5: 28)
- If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. (5: 29)
- When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other to him as well. (5:39)
- So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (5: 48)
- Follow me and let the dead bury their dead. (8:22)
- Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. (10: 34)
- Jesus answered, " I say to you seven times seventy-seven times." (18; 22) [re: forgiving brother]
- Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart. (18: 34-35)



- Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (19:21)
- Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Amen, I say to you it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (19: 23-24)
- Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (26: 52)
- And about three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? Which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27: 46)

As you can see there are many ‘Hard Sayings’ of Jesus for us to wrap our minds around. How do we interpret them in our lives? We, as His disciples must accept this half of the Gospel along with the half we like. Of course the ‘Beatitudes’ in the fifth chapter are also ‘Hard Sayings’ that are at the heart of our Christian Faith. This is why we devoted Unit 1 of Candidacy II to them. If we can integrate the attractive with the difficult, we will have the complete Christian message. “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (Jo. 14: 6) The early Christians were known as belonging “to the way”. (cf. Acts 9: 2)

CONCLUSION

As Dominicans we should have a daily acquaintance with the Scriptures. They should be read, meditated upon and prayed over until “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2: 20) We as Lay Dominicans are on this path with our Rule:

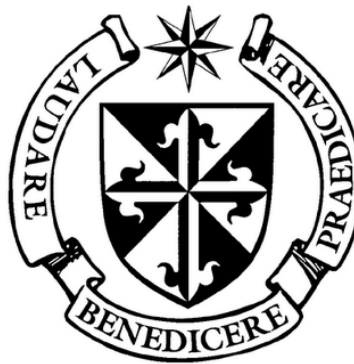
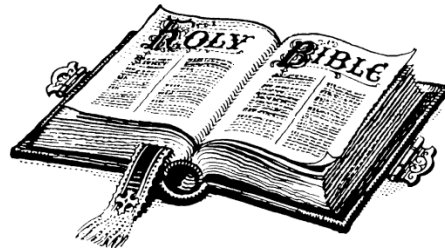
10. To advance in their proper vocation, which inseparably joins the apostolic and the contemplative, Lay Dominicans draw their strength from these principle sources:

a. listening to the Word of God and reading Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament

e. conversion of heart, according to the spirit and practice of evangelical asceticism

As mentioned our task for this unit is to **read and love the Gospel of St. Matthew**, so we can say with Jeremiah:

“When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart.” (15: 16)



Christ Lives in Me