



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE ITALIAN BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION

Clementine Hall

Friday, 12 September 2014

Dear Friends,

I am meeting with you at the end of National Bible Week, promoted by the Italian Biblical Institute. This meeting inaugurates the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution. We should be grateful for the breakthroughs, the result of extensive research, the Council offered us, as well as for the abundance and ease of access to the Sacred Scriptures. The Christian needs it more than ever as today, assailed as we are by contrasting cultural stimuli. For the faith to respond, to avoid being suffocated, it must be constantly nourished by the Word of God.

I express my esteem and appreciation for the valuable work you carry out in your ministry as teachers and as scholars of the Bible. In addition, this meeting gives me the opportunity to reaffirm, in continuity with the Magisterium of the Church, the importance of biblical exegesis for the People of God. Let us recall the affirmation of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "Biblical exegesis", — I'm quoting — "fulfils, in the Church and in the world, an indispensable task. To attempt to bypass it when seeking to understand the Bible would be to create an illusion and display lack of respect for the inspired Scripture.... Addressing men and women, from the beginnings of the Old Testament onward, God made use of all the possibilities of human language, while at the same time accepting that his word be subject to the constraints inherent in the limitations of this language. Proper respect for inspired Scripture requires that every effort be made in order to gather its meaning correctly. Certainly, it is not possible that each Christian personally pursue every type of research which allows for a better understanding of the biblical text. This task is entrusted to exegetes, who have the responsibility in this matter to see that all profit from their labour" (cf. *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Eglise*, 15 April 1993, Conclusion).

Meeting with the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the occasion of the presentation of the Document just quoted, Saint John Paul II recalled that “in order to respect the coherence of the Church’s faith and of scriptural inspiration, Catholic exegesis must be careful not to limit itself to the human aspects of the biblical texts. First and foremost, it must help the Christian people to more clearly perceive the word of God in these texts so that they can receive them properly in order to live in full communion with God” (ORE 28 April 1993, p. 4). To achieve this, it is of course necessary that the exegete himself be able to perceive in the text the divine Word — and this is possible only if his spiritual life is fervent, rich in dialogue with the Lord; otherwise exegetical research is incomplete, losing sight of its main objective.

In the Conclusion of the Document, there is a very effective expression: “Catholic exegesis does not have the right to become lost, like a stream of water, in the sands of a hypercritical analysis”.

Thus, in addition to academic competence, what is required of the Catholic exegete first and foremost is faith, received and shared with the body of believing people, which in its totality cannot err. I refer again to the words of St John Paul II: “to arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God, who ‘is love’” (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) (ORE 28 April 1993, p. 4).

The model is the Virgin Mary, who, St Luke tells us, pondered in her heart the words and events concerning her Son Jesus (cf. Lk 2:19). May Our Lady teach us to welcome the Word of God fully, not only through intellectual research, but in our whole life.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you again, I bless you and your work, and I ask you to please pray for me.