

# THE POPULAR READING OF THE BIBLE

## The Word – A School of Community Ongoing Formation for a Renewed Missionary Journey

### INTRODUCTION

Here you have a new insert of Ongoing Formation for the important liturgical time of Lent-Easter, a time in which the Word of God is central.

In Lent, especially, we are reminded that “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (*Dt 8,3; Mt 4,4*).

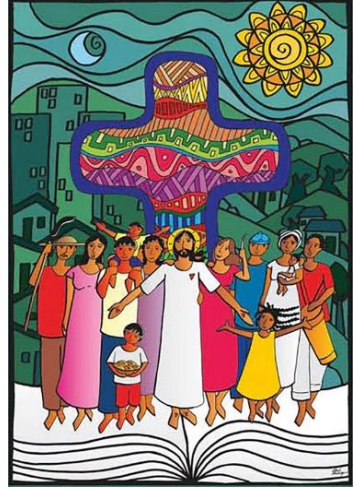
The conversion to which the Lord invites us at this time is to go to Christ, stay with him in the desert, obediently listen to the Father and to the challenges of humanity, allowing ourselves to be nourished and transfigured by him so as to become credible witnesses of the Kingdom.

Also, the *Chapter Acts 2022*, in numbers 12 and 13,2-3, invites us to place the Word of God at the centre of the process towards human and spiritual growth, as it is also the driving force of the inner life, lived on a personal and community level as missionary disciples ‘rooted in Christ’.

Let us, therefore, allow the Word to accompany us during this liturgical period.

Apart from the method of *lectio divina*, which is well known in the tradition of the Church, among the many ways of approaching Holy Scripture we also have the *popular reading of the Bible*.

Father Rafael González Ponce, mccc, presents and assists us in this way of reading and praying the Word so that we can use it in our communities to share our life as believers.



## A) THE POPULAR READING OF THE BIBLE

The popular reading of the Bible is a manner of approaching the Biblical text from the point of view of daily life.

- The subject is the *active community itself*, especially the poor who allow themselves to be surprised by the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- *The aim* is not only to acquire new knowledge but also a new attitude towards life that enables us to transform reality (Carlos Mesters defines this as a dialogue between the Bible and Life).

Reading the Word of God, the individuals *construct a process* by means of which – through accounts, perceptions, discoveries, formulations, gestures, cries, and struggles – they nourish their hopes and take up liberating commitments.

### 1. CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE MEETINGS

- Step One (the context):** *reading the book of life*, that is, listening to people's realities, their concrete problems and their challenges. It is, in fact, in events that the more meaningful prophetic signs appear. After that, the more urgent theme to be deepened is chosen. That which affects life in its various manifestations, all that dehumanises and all that reveals the resurrection of the Lord is taken into consideration in the community.
- Step Two (the text):** *reading the book of the Bible*, to study it seriously and with commitment. The text, or texts to be deepened are chosen to determine the authentic message and its actualisation, by sharing the reflections and feelings that the texts bring about. The Sacred Scripture is welcomed as the Word of God, a light for the path and the criterion of discernment.
- Step Three (the pre-text):** in prayer and in an attitude of faith, we seek to discover what God is saying to the community and to each person, *here and now*. The group asks itself what the vital meaning of the texts is, what actions they exhort us to take, and what changes they ask of us. It is also a moment of

celebrating the life of the creative Spirit, a time of silence, interiorisation, conversion and transformation. We become aware that the journey must continue, with gratitude for what has been accomplished and asking for the strength to continue it.

## 2. METHODOLOGY OF SHARING

The *Popular Reading of the Bible* is a school of community ongoing formation. We learn from women and men, young people and adults, who get involved in alternative proposals, experiencing in their hearts the God present in history.

- a. **Participation:** it does not just mean assisting, but achieving protagonism, a certain degree of ‘empowerment’. Ultimately, participation must lead to a fuller development of people, based on solidarity with others.
- b. **Horizontality:** everyone has something to teach and something to learn. We learn both from theory and practice, from play and from emotions. It means learning to be community subjects (Paulo Freire said that our wisdom does not become such if it is not enriched by the knowledge of others: “I am not, if you are not; above all, I am not, if I forbid you to be”).
- c. **Criticality:** the formation of critical subjects and communities, to consolidate a position (with criteria) in the face of social disorder, and to creatively seek transformation strategies with justice and dignity, according to the will of God.
- d. **Creativity:** people who are free have an infinite richness to express life in the face of the Word of God. Among these mediations, there are dance, theatre, art, music, singing, poetry, games, various styles of collective reflection, contact with nature, and full involvement of body and mind.

## CONCLUSION

*The Popular Reading of the Bible does not consist in interpreting the Sacred Text, but in interpreting life with the help of the Bible.* It is not a doctrine imposed from above, but, as happened in the first Christian communities, it is the offer of a ‘way’, which is the Good News of the Kingdom brought by Jesus Christ. This is why it is essential to go beyond ‘artificial issues’ that have no connection with the lives of people who struggle every day.

At this point, I would like to quote the theologian Elsa Tamez: “It is true that the poor did not teach me the methods of biblical sciences, nor Greek, nor Hebrew, and yet, to the excluded, including the poor, women, indigenous people, and even the deaf, I owe what in Latin America and the Caribbean we call life-giving biblical rereading.”

## B) A PROPOSAL OF DEEPENING

### 1. From the *Rule of Life*

“The Comboni Missionary makes the Word of God his basic prayer. Open to the Spirit, he receives Christ as the living Word of the Father, recognises him in the Scriptures and in the life of the Church, he seeks his presence in human events and encounters” (*RL* 47).

### 2. A Biblical text to review our experience

*Luke 24, 13-35* – Compare each element of this passage with the passages outlined in the Popular Reading of the Bible.

### 3. Questions for reflection and sharing

- ✓ What place does the Word of God have in our Christian and Comboni missionary life?
- ✓ Are we able to share the Word of God in community, welcoming it as a criterion of discernment for our style of life?
- ✓ Is Sacred Scripture the source and marrow of our evangelising action?
- ✓ In what way have the poorest and most abandoned taught us to read the Biblical text?

*Father Rafael González Ponce, mccj*