

Column

Today the Bible is readily available to anyone who wants to read it. It can be purchased in every imaginable configuration and translation . . . and now read on the Internet. A copy can be found in hotel rooms across the land. Most homes have one or more copies.

Not only is it readily available, it is highly revered and praised, even by nonbelievers. For example, outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins has written:

“You can’t appreciate English literature unless you are to some extent at least steeped in the King James Bible . . . There are phrases that come from it – people don’t realize they come from it – proverbial phrases, phrases that make echoes in people’s minds. They haunt our minds because we are a Christian culture, we come from a Christian culture and not to know the King James Bible, is to be in some small way, barbarian.”

In spite of its availability and the praise heaped on it by so many, the Bible is in fact an ‘under-read’ book. It often gets left on the shelf collecting dust even by those who profess to believe that it is the Word of God and contains all thing necessary for salvation.

I am thinking of the Bible today because Dec. 8 is Bible Sunday. Each year, Bible Sunday is celebrated on the Second Sunday in Advent, but how do these two themes -- the Bible and Advent -- mesh together?

In Advent (the season made up of the four Sundays before Christmas), Christians anticipate the annual celebration of our Lord’s First Advent, but they also anticipate His Second. And here is how the Bible fits into the Advent scheme: It was through the reading and study of Scripture that those who awaited Christ’s first coming – BC -- were given encouragement and hope. So it is with us who await His Second – AD.

In the Bible, we learn from where we came – God. We also learn our problem as humans – sin. ‘Sin’, as I am using the term here, is not just that I do a few bad things and so do you, it is a weight that pulls us and society down, a disease of the soul.

At the same time, the Bible gives us God’s answer to the human problem. The Sun of righteousness arises with ‘healing in His wings’ (Malachi 4:2). This Sun of Righteousness is none other than Jesus whose coming as a babe in Bethlehem we joyfully celebrate at Christmas.

Light has come into the world; yet, if we look around us, there is still much darkness. Hate is strong, and death still stalks us and ours, but again the Bible comes to our rescue and gives us understanding: “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28 RSV).

Thus, the sacred writings give us hope just as they did God’s Old Testament people. These writings remind us that the darkness we find around us in the world at this present moment will not go on forever. The Sun will arise once more. So, take hope, and, yes, read your Bible for daily encouragement and blessing!

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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