 Reading time: 4 min.

In a chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, which deals with ‘Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church’, all the Christian faithful are urged to read the Holy Book frequently.

It is a fact that in Don Bosco’s time in Piedmont, in parish and school catechesis, personal reading of the biblical text was not yet sufficiently practised. Rather than having direct recourse to it they used to do catechesis on Catholic doctrine with examples taken from Compendiums of Bible History.

And this was also the case in Valdocco.

This is not to say that Don Bosco did not personally read and meditate on the Bible. Already in the Seminary at Chieri he had Martini’s Bible at his disposal, as well as well-known commentaries such as those by Calmet. But it is a fact that when he was in the Seminary, it was treatises of a doctrinal nature that were mainly developed rather than biblical studies proper, even if the dogmatic treatises evidently included biblical quotations. As a cleric, Bosco was not content with this and became self-taught in the matter.

In the summer of 1836, Fr Cafasso, who had been asked to find someone, proposed that his student Bosco teach Greek to the boarders at the Collegio del Carmine in Turin. They had been evacuated to Montaldo because of the threat of cholera. This prompted him to take Greek seriously so he was suitable for teaching it.

With the help of a Jesuit priest who had a profound knowledge of Greek, cleric Bosco made great progress. In only four months the learned Jesuit had him translate almost the whole New Testament, and then, for a further four years, every week he checked some Greek composition or version that Bosco sent him and which he punctually revised with appropriate observations. “In this way,” says Don Bosco, “I was able to translate Greek almost as well as one would do Latin.”

His first biographer assures us that on 10 February 1886, by then elderly and unwell, Don Bosco was still reciting a few chapters of St Paul’s Epistles in Greek and Latin in the presence of his disciples.

From the same *Biographical Memoirs* we learn that the cleric John Bosco, in the summer, at Sussambrino, where he lived with his brother Joseph, used to go up to

the top of the vineyard belonging to Turco and there he devoted himself to studies he had not been able to attend to during the school year, especially the study of Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testaments*, the geography of the Holy Places, and the principles of Hebrew, acquiring sufficient knowledge of these.

In 1884, he still remembered the study he had made of Hebrew and in Rome was heard engaging with a professor of Hebrew on the explanation of certain original phrases of the prophets, making comparisons with parallel texts from various books of the Bible. He was also working on a translation of the New Testament from Greek.

Don Bosco, therefore, as self-taught, was an attentive scholar of the Bible's writings.

One day, while still a student of theology, he wanted to visit his old teacher and friend Fr Giuseppe Lacqua who lived in Ponzano. The latter, having been informed of the proposed visit, wrote him a letter in which he told him, among other things, 'come the time to visit me, remember to bring me the three small volumes of the Holy Bible'.

This is clear proof that the cleric Bosco was studying them.

As a young priest, he was talking with his parish priest, Fr Cinzano, about Christian mortification. Don Bosco then quoted him the words of the Gospel: *'Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me*. If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross *daily* and follow me'). Fr Cinzano interrupted him saying:

"You are adding a word, that quotidie *(= every day) which is not there in the gospel."*

And Don Bosco replied:

"This word is not found in three evangelists, but it is in the gospel of St Luke. Consult the ninth chapter, verse 23, and you will see that I am not adding anything."

The good parish priest, who was skilled in ecclesiastical disciplines, had not noticed the verse from St Luke, whereas Don Bosco had paid attention to it. Several times Fr Cinzano recounted this incident with gusto.

Don Bosco's commitment in Valdocco



Don Bosco then demonstrated this deep interest and study of Sacred Scripture in many other ways, and he did much at Valdocco to make its contents known to his children.

One thinks of his edition of *Bible History,* first published in 1847 and then reprinted in 14 editions and dozens and dozens of reprints until 1964.

One thinks of all his other writings related to biblical history, such as *An easy for for learning Bible History,* first published in 1850; the *Life of St Peter, which* came out in January 1857 as a booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; the *Life of St Paul,* which came out in April of the same year as a booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; the *Life of St Joseph,* which came out in the March 1867 booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; etc.

Don Bosco then kept maxims from Sacred Scripture in his Breviary, such as the following: *'Bonus Dominus et confortans in die tribulationis'*.

He had sentences from Holy Scripture painted on the walls of the Valdocco portico, such as the following: *'Omnis enim, qui petit accipit, et qui quaerit invenit, et pulsanti aperietur'*.

As early as 1853 he wanted his clerical students of philosophy and theology to study ten verses of the New Testament every week and recite them word for word on Thursday mornings.

When this began, all the clerics were holding the volume of the Latin Vulgate Bible and had opened it at the first lines of St Matthew's Gospel. But after saying the prayer, Don Bosco began reciting verse 18 of chapter 16 of Matthew in Latin: *"Et ego dico tibi quia tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevalebunt adversus eam": "*And I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." He really wanted his sons to always keep this evangelical truth in their minds and hearts.