

When we consider the goal of our faith, one way to describe it is that we are to come to know Jesus. On some level, all of our religious practices have that ultimately in mind, but one of the principal ways to know Jesus is through engaging the Scriptures.

In today's second reading the author of Hebrews tells us, "*the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit...*". That's a rather bold statement. Is that your experience? Probably not, and yet millions of faithful would say that their experience of God's word has shown it to be true. *How can a book be living and effective?*

The word "effective", from the Greek word *energés* (from which we get the word "energy"), is probably better translated as "active". It's alive and active, like heat or light, like the sun. It's not merely "effective," like an economic policy or a computer.<sup>1</sup> *Again, how is a book alive or active?*

Consider this: When we read the Bible with a desire to hear God, to know Jesus, we find that it is not an ordinary book. In fact, it reads us. When we look at it, it looks at us, like another person outside looking through the window at you, another face looking at you from the mirror.<sup>2</sup>

The face is Jesus Christ, of course. I remind us that we say the word of God in reference to the Bible itself, but the Word of God also refers to Jesus Christ. As we say in John's Gospel: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh...*" (John 1:1, 14).

The Bible has many words in it, but God has only one Word in Him: Jesus Christ. The Word of God is a book, but even more, a person. When you read this book, it's intended to bring to an encounter with the person.

Understand, when one reads the Bible with the desire to hear God, to know Jesus, it is a form of prayer, it is a conversation with God. When we are authentically at prayer, we are never alone. The Word of God is with you—not bodily, as he is on the cross and in the Eucharist, but spiritually. But spiritual presence is real presence.<sup>3</sup>

Today's reading says that the word of God is "*sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit...*", that it eventually cuts into your heart. I read something this week that suggested that your soul includes your conscious relation to yourself—to your body, your conscious thought, desires, feelings and choices, but also relation to other people.

On the other hand, your spirit includes your relation to God, which is both conscious and subconscious, both clear and mysterious, rational and mystical. The human spirit is much deeper and more mysterious than the physical universe.<sup>4</sup>

As we're told, this living and active word of God, which penetrates soul and spirit, which cuts into the heart, reveals us in truth. I think of Psalm 139, ascribed to King David: "*LORD, you have searched me, you know me... before a word is on my tongue, LORD, you know it... My bones are not hidden from you, When I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me unformed... Search me, God, know my heart...*" David confesses this truth in joy and praise, desiring to be known by God, standing in the light even when it reveals his sins.

But not everyone loves that nakedness before God, being called out of the shadows, from our places of hiding, obliging us to account for ourselves. I think of influential philosophers like Sartre and Nietzsche, whose writings reveal that they don't want to live in a world where God knows everything about them, and thus they choose to declare that there is no God.

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<sup>1</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle B)* (Food for the Soul Series Book 2). Word on Fire. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

*What about us? Does fear have you longing to hide and perhaps even secretly wishing there is no God? Or do you desire to be seen in truth, to live in the light, to be known by your beloved? Do you want to see that face in the window and hear his words, as a source of comfort and assurance, as it has for so many of the faithful through the centuries?* For us who long to hear Him and to better know ourselves in truth, I'll suggest the following four ways:

- 1) Acknowledge a desire to believe and trust in His deep and persistent love for you.
- 2) Regularly read from the Bible, especially the Gospels.
- 3) Have a routine that allows for personal prayer every day. In that prayer, persistently ask God to show you what He wills for your life...and take time to listen.
- 4) Live in the light by going to confession with some regularity.

*The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating between soul and spirit...everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account."*