**Courage Ministry**

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 **Spiritual Reading**

**Introduction**

The Courage ministry has five goals: the second is **Prayer and Dedication:-** *Dedicate one’s life to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.*

In the second goal spiritual reading is recommended and encouraged. In a personal comment, I find at least two scriptures that come easily to mind when I reflect on the significance of what spiritual reading is and does to my interior life. Ephesians 4:23*. Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution, so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God’s way, in the good- ness and holiness of the truth*; and Hebrews 4:12 *The word of God is living and active; it probes the thoughts and motives of our heart.* (This is the actual Gospel Acclamation of 21st June, the day I am writing.) Over time and in our life as committed members of the Body of Christ we will experience the truth of these scriptures.

**The Word of God**

The fundamental spiritual reading is the Word of God. As a committed Catholic my daily routine is to meditate on the Gospel of the day and occasionally on the first reading of the Mass, be it from the Old Testament or the New Testament. I know that the Word of God is alive in my heart (see Hebrews 4:12) and I need to be active in acknowledging the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as I discern what the scriptures are proclaiming.

There are so many ways to appreciate the scriptures. Apart from the biblical scholars and commentaries, I find homilies, lectures, study and being involved in various groups that share the Sunday Gospel is fruitful. I gain a wholesome and compelling perspective from these sources. However we need other helps such as the inspirational messages and lessons that can be obtained by reading the lives of the saints, sound spiritual classics and contemporary authors. I find the Office of Readings that can be obtained from the breviary and /or Universalis app, quite dynamic when quoting stories, lessons, and sermons from Church Fathers and Mothers, and various saints including the Doctors of the Church.

**The Document s of Vatican II and Pontifical works**.

The Vatican Council documents, have built their teaching and insights on the Bible, especially its Constitution - The *Dei Verbum* document on Revelation. It is so important for the People of God to appreciate the context, definitions and divine inspiration behind the 72 canonical books of the bible. *Dei Verbum* in chapter five on the New Testament tells us in its opening sentence that:- *The Word of God , which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe* (Rom. 1:16). The Documents are a constant spiritual read for me.

The Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations are worth studying, although not usually easy to digest – but provide many examples of faith and works for us.

**How do we choose sound and enlightening spiritual writers**?

 I learnt from my first boss at work when I was 14 years old about Frank Sheed, Gilbert Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, John Henry Newman and Fulton Sheen. Hence I would advise a person with a serious desire to come closer to God, to check out with a parish priest, regular confessor, or mentor/ spiritual leader and a spiritual director. If you have no person you know I would highly recommend contact with the Evangelization Office within your Archdiocese.

**Spiritual Classics that I recommend – You can always go back to them:-**

The Imitation of Christ

Saint Augustine – Confessions.

Saint Teresa of Avila – many biographies and her own writings

Saint Francis de Sales - Introduction to the Devout Life – I have used this classic whenever I go to Adoration.

Saint Therese of Lisieux – Autobiography of a Saint – The Story of a Soul

Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman - Apologia Pro Vita Sua, (And any other Newman work, or biography, although difficult is worth working through).

Saint Francis of Assisi – G.K Chesterton

Saint Pope John XXIII – Journey of a Soul

Saint Paul VI – Evangelii Nuntiandi - a Magnifcent Encyclical 1975

Saint John of the Cross – The Dark Night of the Soul.

Some of the above mentioned works are better read after trying more simple works or biographies of the particular saint. I am finding this at the moment.

**More recent works I recommend for your encouragement and inspiration**

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross – A Biography - Waltraud Herbstrith

Saint Mary MacKillop – Paul Gardiner SJ - The Authorised Biography

Saint Pope John Paul II - Gift and Mystery

Abbot Dom Chautard - The Soul of the Apostolate – A stirring encouragement

Father Thomas Merton – Elected Silence

Dorothy Day – The Long Loneliness – The Autobiography

Raniero Cantalamessa – Life in the Lordship of Christ - ( And any books by him)

Ralph Martin – Hungry for God ( Practical Help in Personal Prayer) Very Good!

Douglas Hyde – I Believed; Somewhat dated. (Communist became a Catholic)

St Paul’s Publication – Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Leon Suenens- The Gospel to Every Creature; (and others by him)

**Books by Australian Authors that are fruitful for coming closer to God**

I have found five Australian authors excellent:

Paul Glynn, a Marist, his book, *Psalms - Songs for the way Home*; Ken Barker, a Missionary of God’s love, his book - *Amazing Love;* Michael Casey, a Cistercian Monk, his book - *Grace;* and any of his books; Denis Edwards, An Adelaide theologian, his *– Human Experience of God;* Anthony Percy Vicar General of Canberra - *Theology of the Body: Made Simple*

**Other authors I strongly recommend whose insights and wisdom inspire us**

Pope Benedict XVI – Jesus of Nazareth; – I Believe in One God

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger - The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood; Journey towards Easter

Romano Guardini – The Spirit of the Liturgy; Prayer in Practice; The Lord’s Prayer

Thomas H.Green SJ – Weeds among the Wheat

Francis MacNutt - Healing

Michael Scanlan – Inner Healing

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Life Together: Christology; Letters & Papers from Prison

CS Lewis – Mere Christianity and any of his spiritual and fictional works.

I know that there are very many other excellent works, but what I have detailed here are the works that I have found helpful over many years in deepening and forming my mind, conscience and heart for the love of God.

**All have a different perspective and particular spirituality which we respect**

I realize that reading is vastly different for every person. Many now go to blogs and the internet. For all of us are unique in our style and practice of learning and that picking up a book is almost quite unusual. I, however, do recommend a book in the hand, because you can go back to it and see what you have underlined in the past. This is where your spiritual/mentor can assist when you decide that you ought to spend a time for reflection and spiritual reading.

**An experience of Courage members**

At our last Courage meeting on Sunday 20th  a Courage member stated that engaging with another person allows us to experience a deeper realization of what we read. One other member uses the Magnificat magazine as a permanent source of blessing. Another uses the Imitation of Christ and yet another the daily readings of the Mass. Each one is faithful to his /her temperament and personality. This creates a very fruitful exchange of insight for our life in Christ. The absolute goal of spiritual reading is basically to develop a more determined desire for God and his plans and ways for us.

**Conclusion**

Let us share our particular spiritual resources and so learn from one another how we might become more mindful of God’s way, will and purpose for our life in Christ. Spiritual reading ought to increase our desire and affection for God.

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