

A Guide To Spiritual Reading (and more)

by Rev. T.G. Morrow

The slow reading of Sacred Scripture takes precedence over all the following. I recommend one chapter or less per day of The New Jerusalem Bible, the version with footnotes.

The lives of the saints bear a particular relationship to Sacred Scripture. St. Francis de Sales wrote, "there is no more difference between the Gospel written and the life of a saint than between music written and music sung."

The books in the first section are recommended for those who are new to spiritual reading. They were chosen for their interest and readability. More advanced spirituality, in books more difficult to read, is found in the lists, "intermediate" and "advanced" which follow.

Spiritual reading should be done a little at a time, from five to fifteen minutes a day, but every day without fail, barring some extraordinary crisis. It should be second in priority only to prayer. It is done for formation, not for entertainment, and thus doing only a small amount daily will keep the more interesting material from being consumed too quickly - and not retained - and the less interesting from being too painful. Note well: spiritual reading is very different from theological reading.

BEGINNER LIST

1. Our Lady of Fatima, by William Thomas Walsh; and The Sun Danced at Fatima, by Joseph A. Pelletier, both Image Books. The most fascinating books ever written about these apparitions of Mary in 1917 to three small children in Portugal.
2. The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, John Beavers. Image. Good translation. A classic.
3. St. Anthony, the Wonder-Worker of Padua, by C. Stoddard, TAN Books. Brief but inspiring, on a brilliant, but humble saint.
4. A Woman Clothed with the Sun, by John Delaney, Image Books. Brief summaries of eight appearances by the Blessed Mother.
5. Treasure In Clay, autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen, Doubleday. Fascinating account of This famous, holy priest and bishop, the "TV Priest."
6. Wife, Mother and Mystic by Albert Bessieres, S.J. Extraordinary Story of Bl. Anna-Maria Taigi (1769 - 1837), who was just what the book title says.
7. The Wonder of Guadalupe by Francis Johnston, TAN Books. Story of Our Lady's apparition to a simple Mexican Indian, and her miraculous gift of her image on his cloak.

8. Francis, the Journey and the Dream, by Murray Bodo, OFM, St. Anthony Messenger Press. Brief account of this most popular saint.
9. Prison to Praise by Merlin Carothers. Fascinating account of how this Methodist minister turned his life around by praising God always, even in apparent disasters, trusting that "All things work out unto good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28)
10. A Man of Faith, by Jeanne Gosselin Arnold. Family Theater, Inc. The story of Fr. Patrick Peyton, world-famous promoter of the rosary.
11. Padre Pio, by Fr. Carty, TAN Books. Biography of the stigmatist who died in 1968.
12. Eucharistic Miracles by Joan Carroll Cruz, TAN. If you want to deepen your love and reverence for the Eucharist, this is the book to read.
13. The Cure d' Ars by Francis Trochu, TAN Books. Best account of this delightful humble priest.

INTERMEDIATE LIST

1. The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life, Garrigou-Lagrange, TAN Books. Explains the three levels in spiritual growth. A classic.
2. Soul of the Apostolate, Dom Chautard. TAN. Points out the need to build apostolic works on prayer. A classic
3. Introduction to the Devout Life. St. Francis de Sales, Image Books. THE book on lay spirituality.
4. The Seven Story Mountain by Thomas Merton; Harcourt Brace, Jovanovitch. Autobiography of atheist turned Trappist monk, died in 1965.
5. The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas a Kempis, Image. Short thoughts on how to become holy. Spiritual classic.
6. The Way, Bl. Josemarie Escriva, Scepter Books, Twentieth century counterpart to The Imitation of Christ, by the founder of Opus Dei.
7. Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, TAN. Private revelations of God the Father to St. Catherine of Siena, the great saint and doctor of the Church.
8. The Life of Christ, Fulton J. Sheen, Image. Insightful explanation by Bishop Sheen of all the major passages of the gospels.

9. The Screwtape Letters; The Four Loves; Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis. Three modern classics by a 20th century Anglican apologist for Christianity.
10. Apologia Pro Vita Sua, Cardinal John Newman, Image Books. Account of this brilliant, intellectual Anglican priest's conversion to Catholicism.
11. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Image Books. A guide to a 30 day retreat by the founder of the Jesuits.
12. The Complete Spiritual Doctrine of St. Therese of Lisieux, Fr. Jamart, OCD, Alba House. Excellent insights into St. Therese and her spirituality.
13. Saint Margaret Mary, by Leon Cristiani, St. Paul. Unusual story of this sister to whom Christ revealed the devotion to His Sacred Heart. Also see St. Margaret Mary's Autobiography, by TAN Books.
14. The Holy Eucharist, and a host of other books by St. Alphonsus Ligouri; TAN books. Classic works.
15. True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, by St. Louis de Montfort. TAN. A classic on finding Jesus through consecration to Mary.
16. Butler's Lives of the Saints, 4 vole, Christian Classics or I vole version by Harper & Row. Classic.
17. Mercy is My Mission and Divine Mercy In My Soul, The Diary of Bl. Sister Faustian. Marian Press, Stockbridge, MA 02163.

ADVANCED LIST

These works are more difficult reading but are deeply spiritual (No pain, no gain!)

1. The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Avila, 3 Vols, Institute for Carmelite Studies: Her Autobiography (read this first), The Way of Perfection, Interior Castle, etc. You must read this woman. Great!
2. The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross; Institute for Carmelite Studies: Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame of Love, read first. Then try the more difficult, The Dark Night of the Soul, and The Ascent of Mount Carmel. St. John was a contemporary of and collaborator with St. Teresa of Avila in reforming the Carmelite Order in the 16th century. Not easy reading but super classics!
3. Confessions of St. Augustine, Image and other publishers. The classic autobiography of St. Augustine, sinner turned saint.

4. City of God, St. Augustine, Image Books. Another classic by Augustine. A philosophical analysis of the two cities, the earthly, and the heavenly.
5. The Cloud of Unknowing, Anonymous, Image Books, Deep. On contemplation, perfection.
6. Writings of the Church Fathers such as St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Great, St. Ephraem, St. Ambrose, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen.

RECOMMENDED CATHOLIC PERIODICALS
(This is not spiritual reading)

Arlington Catholic Herald - 200 N. Glebe Road, Arlington, VA. Weekly publication.

Homiletic and Pastoral Review - 86 Riverside Dr. NY, NY 10024.

This Rock - P.O. Box 17181, San Diego, CA 92177. Magazine of Catholic Apologetics.

Crisis - Box 1006, Notre Dame, IN 46556, 1-800-852-9962. Monthly Magazine.

Catholic World Report - P.O. Box 6718, Syracuse, NY 13217, 1-800-825-0061. Monthly.

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Catholic Diocese of Arlington
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Catholic Faith Alive! Inc.
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