**To teach you must learn first (Longmeadow, 12/6/2016)**

The bible [KJV] contains 788,258 words. The word “GOD” appears 4,293 times and the word “LORD” 7,365 times(1). What really struck me is that from the list of most common words in the Bible you can compose the sentence **“The Lord/God shall/will always be with you”**. If you add the occurrences of each of these words the total amounts to 68,478, almost a 10% of the entire Bible words!

I take this statement as a good summary of the collection of the 73 (46 OT, 27 NT) books that the Bible contains. The statement actually gains even more relevance as these were the last words of Christ before His ascension:

*Matthew 28- (18) Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely,* ***I am with you always****, to the very end of the age.”*

The Lord gave us this reassurance because he was sending us forth to evangelize, teach and baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity. If we want to be His disciples, this is the task at hand. And there is no human way to be able to perform it consistently without faith, hope and charity, without making a conscious decision with our spirit, our minds and our heart to bring the Lord into our lives. It is not us who chose the Lord.

*John 15:16- It was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last*. (This happened to be today’s (12/6/2016) communion antiphon. Thanks God!)

The word “go” appears 1544 times in the Bible. I just mentioned one of those instances. Actually, when we go to Mass the priest sends us forth to preach and live the Gospel. He says “Go”, keep going, remember that the relationship with Jesus is not temporarily interrupted until the next Mass, go and continue living that relationship in everything you do in your life.

Jesus tells us that is our mission to evangelize, teach and baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity. The Church through its Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium (Paul VI, 11/21/1964) tells us that we, as laity and people of this world, have the unique opportunity to collaborate with the Church and perform an apostolic mission in places and situations where only through us the Word can become salt of the earth.

But, how can we TEACH if we don’t know our faith? How can we explain with simple words what we believe if we have not LEARNed it?

How much do we know about the foundation of our faith, our Lord, the Gospel writers, the Old Testament, our Church, our Creed, our Prayers and Traditions, the teachings of the Church on human life, sacraments, social justice? and so much more.

I will give you an example. When we pray the “Hail Mary”, do you know where those words come from? How do you explain to a non-Catholic that you are actually quoting words from the Gospel, that praying to Mary is reciting beautiful words that are contained in the Gospel and not invented by men? The answer in this case is the following (this is the simple version, much more could be added):

**Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you**

*Gabriel Archangel, Luke 1:28 (literal)*

**Blessed are you among women and Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus**

*Gabriel Archangel, Luke 1:42 (literal)*

1. *http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Popular-Bible-Words.php*

**Holy Mary,**

*Angel Gabriel Archangel, Luke 1:28 as Mary is “full of grace”*

**Mother of God,**

*Elizabeth, Luke 1:43 (And why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?)*

*St. Paul Col 2:9  ‘For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’*

*(Denying Mary as Mother of God means denying Jesus of his divinity)*

**Pray for us sinners**

*Common early Christian practice to pray for each other as in 2 The 3:1, 1 The 5:25, etc*

*John 5:16- If anyone sees his brother sinning […] he should pray to God and He will give him life.*

**Now and in the hour of our death**

*Mary prayed for Jesus during His whole life up to his own death.*

*We ask her to do the same for us because She was made our mother by Jesus at the cross.*

*John 19:27- He said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”*

**Amen**

*Common Hebrew expression used to agree with, affirm, approve, or emphasize something else that has been said.*

We must also be able to say that by reciting the ‘Hail Mary’ prayer, we do not worship Mother Mary as some claim. In His human existence, Jesus practiced the whole Law to perfection and had no sin in Him (1 Pet 2: 22; Luke 2: 51- 52; Matthew 3: 13- 15; 5: 17- 18). We need to model our lives on Him (1 John 2: 6; 1 Cor 11: 1) We honor Mary as our own mother just as Jesus himself, our model, honored her as His own mother. The right word therefore is ‘veneration’ and not ‘worship’. We address her with the same words which were inspired by the Holy Spirit then, call her with the titles based on scripture and finally ask for her intercession.

These are simple answers that we can learn. We only need to have the desire to know the answer and use the means available to us, including our local Church, to find that answer.

The methodology or discipline to defend or prove the truth of religious doctrines through systematic argumentation and discourse is called Apologetics (from [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) ἀπολογία, "speaking in defense"). [Early Christian writers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_early_Christian_writers) (c. 120–220) who defended their beliefs against critics and recommended their faith to outsiders were called [Christian apologists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_apologists). Nowadays, 'apologetics' is often identified with debates over religion and theology. There are many websites devoted to apologetics. They all teach well.

Apologetics are actively working on many critical subjects and there is a lot written about these issues: the Church and the Papacy, Mary and the Saints, Salvation, Scripture and tradition, Purgatory and the end of times, the Sacraments, mainly Reconciliation and Eucharist, the concept of universal priesthood.

And there are so many more questions! It is not offensive to ask and be asked. We all have the right to ask. The people we try to evangelize will ask questions. I am sure we have our own questions. And when they ask, when we ask, we must make the effort to know the answer, and for that we must make a conscious effort to learn.

We must give our faith a chance to shine through us. The answers we will learn will be sound and coherent, fulfilling, thrilling and elating. Knowing those right answers will deepen our faith, teach us how to teach and evangelize, improve our lives, help us become agents of change, and lead us to live a real Christian life.

Mathew 7:7 – “Seek and you shall find” … so let’s start seeking!

Thanks. pedro