

Reading Scripture: Essential for Christian Living

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, 347—407

St. John Chrysostom says that laypeople must read scripture more regularly than monks because Bible study corrects the bad effects of life's circumstances on our spirituality:

I am always encouraging you to pay attention not only to what is said here in church, but also, when you are at home, to continue constantly in the practice of reading the divine Scriptures For let not anyone say to me those silly, contemptible words, 'I'm stuck at the courthouse all day.' 'I'm tied up with political affairs.' 'I'm in an apprentice program.' 'I'm a businessman.' 'Reading the Bible isn't my thing. That's for those who are set apart, for those who have made the mountaintops their home, who have a way of life without interruptions.'

What are you saying, man? It's not your business to pay attention to the Bible because you are distracted by thousands of concerns? Then Bible reading belongs more to you than to the monks! For they do not make as much use of the help of the divine Scriptures as those who always have a great many things to do But you are always standing in the line of battle and are constantly being hit, so you need more medicine. For not only does your spouse irritate you, but your son annoys you, and a servant makes you lose your temper. An enemy schemes

against you, a friend envies you, a neighbor insults you, a colleague trips you up. Often a lawsuit impends, poverty distresses, loss of possessions bring sorrow. At one moment success puffs you up; at another, failure deflates you. Numerous powerful inducements to anger and anxiety, to discouragement and grief, to vanity and loss of sense surround us on every side. A thousand missiles rain down from every direction. And so we constantly need the whole range of equipment supplied by Scripture

Since many things of this kind besiege our soul, we need the divine medicines, so that we might treat the wounds we already have, and so that we might check beforehand the wounds that are not yet, but are going to be, from afar extinguishing the missiles of the devil and repelling them through the constant reading of the divine Scriptures. For it is not possible, not possible for anyone to be saved who does not constantly have the benefit of spiritual reading.