

教宗方濟各宗座牧函《熱愛聖經》

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教宗方濟各宗座牧函

《熱愛聖經》

紀念聖熱羅尼莫逝世一千六百週年

熱愛聖經及對成文的天主聖言滿懷孺慕之情，這正是聖熱羅尼莫（St. Jerome: Hieronymus）的一生和著述，留給教會的遺產。在聖人逝世一千六百週年之際，這些引自聖熱羅尼莫紀念日集禱經的話，¹ 為我們指出了一條不可少的途徑，好認識這位教會史上的巨擘和他對基督的深愛。這愛有如一條滿布支流的大河，永不言倦。他委實是位聖經學者、譯

¹ 台灣譯：「天主，祢曾恩賜聖業樂司鐸，對聖經的研究獨具強烈的嗜好，及深湛的領悟；求祢賞賜我們也能從祢的聖言中攝取心靈豐富的滋養，尋獲生命的泉源。」（《羅馬彌撒經書》，第三標準修訂版，2020年）。香港譯：「天主，你曾恩賜聖熱羅尼莫司鐸，熱愛聖經，活出聖言；求你使你的子民，也常能從你的聖言，獲得豐富的滋養，找到生命的泉源。」（《羅馬彌撒經書》，第三標準修訂版，2020年）。

者及釋經者，對聖經擁有充分知識，滿懷熱忱教導所知。他對經文有精闢的解釋外，更熱切捍衛基督徒的真理，有時甚至到了激烈的程度。他是個刻苦和一絲不苟的隱修者，同時又是一位慷慨和慈祥的靈修導師。一千六百年後的今天，對我們身為二十一世紀的基督信徒來說，他依然是非常切合時代的人物。

引言

主曆420年9月30日，在白冷靠近聖誕山洞由他建立的團體內，熱羅尼莫結束了他在世的生命。他這樣把自己託付給他經常在聖經中尋求和認識的主，也是他在375年四旬期某天，身患熱症時在神視中所遇到的那位判官。這經歷令他的生命徹底改變過來，這是個歸依時刻，令他對未來完全改觀。在神視中，他被人拉到那位判官前：「他盤問有關我的狀況，我答說是個基督徒」。但那位判官卻說：「你說謊！你是個西塞羅的弟子，不是基督徒。」² 事實上，熱羅尼莫自年青時已醉心古典拉丁文詞的流暢和優雅，他初時把聖經的文字與之相比，感到它們生硬和不符合語法，與他所講究的文學修養相比，簡直是粗陋低劣。

他生平這段軼事，令他決心完全獻身給基督及其聖言，奉獻畢生的努力，透過不倦的翻譯和注釋工作，使聖經的文字變得更平易近人。這經歷在他生命上重定出一個嶄新而決定性的方向：成為天主聖

² 《書信集》22, 30: CSEL 54, 190。

言的僕役，愛上了那「聖經的血肉」。這樣，藉著標誌他一生的不斷鑽研，他利用年青時所學得的，以及在羅馬所接受的培育，重新運用自己的學識，為天主和教會團體作更周全的服務。

為此，聖熱羅尼莫被喻為古代教會最重要的人物之一，是教父黃金時代裡東西方教會間的真正橋梁，實在受之無愧：他是亞奎里亞的魯斐諾（Rufinus of Aquileia）青年時代的朋友，曾與安博（Ambrose）邂逅，跟奧思定（Augustine）有頻密的書信來往。在東方，他又認識額我略納祥（Gregory of Nazianz）、盲者狄狄馬（Didymus the Blind）、撒拉米的厄比法尼（Epiphanius of Salamis）。基督徒畫藝傳統更把他與奧思定、安博和大額我略（Gregory the Great）放在一起，代表西方教會四大聖師。

我的前輩教宗在不同的機會上也提到熱羅尼莫。一個世紀前，本篤十五世在聖人逝世一千五百週年，寫了與他有關的通諭《施慰者聖神》（*Spiritus Paraclitus*, 1920年11月15日），並封他為「釋經大師」（*doctor maximus explanandis Scripturis*）。³較近期的還有本篤十六世，在兩次連續的教理講授中介紹了他的生平和著作。⁴今日在他逝世一千六百週年之際，我也願意紀念聖熱羅尼莫，由

³ 《宗座公報》12 (1920), 385-423。

⁴ 參閱：2007年11月7及14日公開接見信友： *Insegnamenti*, III, 2 (2007), 553-556; 586-591。

他對聖經的熱愛開始，介紹一下他的信息和教導對今日的適切性。

在這意義下，他的思想與那以天主聖言為題的第十二屆世界主教會議，⁵ 以及我的前任教宗本篤十六世的宗座勸諭《上主的話》（*Verbum Domini*, 2010年9月30日聖熱羅尼莫紀念日，⁶ 都是一脈相承的，可被視為可靠的嚮導和獨特的見證。

由羅馬至白冷

聖熱羅尼莫的一生和足跡，全沿著羅馬帝國橫跨了羅馬帝國在歐洲和東方之間的道路。他約於345年在達耳瑪提雅（*Dalmatia*）與帕諾尼雅（*Pannonia*）交界的地區——即今日的克羅地亞或斯洛文尼亞——生於一個基督徒家庭，接受過穩健的教育。按當時慣例，他於358至364年間，在羅馬修辭學府求學時，以成人身分領洗。在羅馬求學期間，他全心傾慕古典拉丁著作，師承當時最著名的修辭學家。

完成學業後，他遍遊高盧，到了特里爾（*Trier*，今德國境內），在那裡首次接觸到由聖亞大納修（*St. Athanasius*）由東方傳來的隱修生活。一個修道的切願遂逐漸成熟過來，伴隨著他來到亞奎里亞（*Aquileia*），他在那裡與一些知己組成了「一個

⁵ 第十二屆世界主教會議，《致天主子民書》（2008年10月24日）。

⁶ 參閱：《宗座公報》102 (2010) 681-787。

真福團體」，⁷ 開始一段團體生活時期。

約在374年，當他途經安提約基雅（Antioch）時，決定退隱到哈爾基斯（Chalcis）曠野，度一個更徹底的苦修生活，並安排大量時間去學習聖經語言，先是修讀希臘文，然後是希伯來文。他得到一位歸依基督的猶太弟兄相助，引導他認識這個對他全新的希伯來文語彙，他曾形容其語音「刺耳和有太多送氣音。」⁸

熱羅尼莫故意選擇曠野和在那裡度這對他有很深意義的隱修生活：這裡是作生命基本抉擇的地方，是與天主契合和邂逅的地方，人在那裡藉著默觀、內心的考驗、靈性的奮鬥，能意識到自己的軟弱，加深認識自己和別人的有限，重新發現眼淚的重要。⁹人在曠野裡才會體會到天主的具體存在，他與天主須有的關係，以及天主仁慈的慰藉。我很喜歡提到一件與此有關的軼事。相傳有一次熱羅尼莫問天主說：「你想我做什麼？」天主答覆他說：「你還沒有交給我一切。」「可是，主啊！我已給了你這個、那個……。」「但尚欠一樣。」「那是什麼？」「你還要把你的罪過交給我，好讓我欣然再次赦免它們。」¹⁰

⁷ *Chronicum* 374: PL 27, 697-698。

⁸ 《書信集》125, 12: CSEL 56, 131。

⁹ 參閱：《書信集》122,3: CSEL 56, 63。

¹⁰ 參閱：[教宗方濟各] 2015年12月10日早晨默想。該事載於A. Louf, *Sotto la guida dello Spirito*, Qiqiaon, Magnano (BI) 1990, 154-155。

他再次來到安提約基雅，由當地主教保利諾（Paulinus）祝聖為司鐸，然後約在379年到了君士坦丁堡（Constantinople），在那裡認識了額我略納祥，並在那裡繼續他的研究，將重要的希臘作品翻譯成拉丁文（例如：奧利振Origen的講道詞和歐瑟比Eusebius的編年史），又於381年親身體驗了在城中舉行的大公會。在這些年的研學中，他求知的熱誠和慷慨精神，表露無遺。他之所以好學不倦，皆因他得不到不罷休的心所使然：「我間或會感到沮喪，多次更會放棄；但不久又重拾起來，堅持學習下去，」由這些求學的「苦澀種子」，收穫到「甘飴的成果」。¹¹

熱羅尼莫在382年回到羅馬，為教宗達瑪甦（Damasus）服務，後者很賞識他的才華，二人遂合作無間。熱羅尼莫在那裡不停工作，但總沒有忽略靈修生活：他得到瑪塞拉（Marcella）、保拉（Paula）及其女兒歐多欽（Eustochium）等熱衷度徹底福音生活的羅馬貴婦相助，在阿文庭（Aventine）山丘上成立了一個專心研讀聖經的小團體，而他就是團體中的釋經者、老師和靈修導師。這時期，他開始著手修訂一些福音的早期拉丁譯文，還有一些其他新約經書；他仍繼續翻譯奧利振的講道詞和釋經著作，並展開頻密的通信活動，又公開駁斥異端作者，有時甚至用上過分的嚴詞厲語，不過總是出於他維護真正信仰和聖經道理的真誠意願。

¹¹ 參閱：《書信集》125,12: CSEL 56, 131。

這工作緊張和豐碩的時期，不久因教宗達瑪甦的逝世而中斷。他被迫離開羅馬，帶同幾位朋友一起來埃及，繼續已開始的靈修經驗和聖經研讀。他在那裡認識了偉大的神學家盲者狄狄馬，然後又來到巴勒斯坦，於386年在白冷定居下來。他實地接觸聖經事蹟發生的地點，在那裡繼續鑽研聖經語文。

他對聖地的重視，不但見於他自386年至逝世期間選擇在巴勒斯坦生活一事上，更表現於他為朝聖者所作的服務。他在自己特愛的白冷，靠近聖誕山洞的地方，成立了一男一女兩間修道院，連同招待「到聖地」(*ad loca sancta*)朝聖者的旅舍，這都顯出他慷慨款待前來瞻仰和接觸救恩史之地的人，讓他們把探索文化和靈修連結起來。¹²

熱羅尼莫在他靜心聆聽的聖經內認識到自己，並找到天主和弟兄姊妹們的面貌，這令他對團體生活的喜愛有增無已。他建立修道團體，按照團體方式度隱修生活的切願，源自昔日他與知心好友在亞奎里亞度的生活。他視修道院如同「角力場」般，是鍛鍊人「視己於眾人以下，好能成為人上人」的地方，為能清貧樂道，以身作則。他認為「在同一長上管治下，與眾人一起」生活，能培育人謙遜、忍耐、靜默與溫良之德，他深明「真理不愛黑暗的角落，也不喜歡愛抱怨的人。」¹³ 他也承認自己「很

12 參閱：《上主的話》宗座勸諭，89：《宗座公報》102 (2010)，761-762。

13 參閱：《書信集》125, 9.15.19: CSEL 56, 128. 133-134. 139。

渴望修道院的斗室，（……）冀望有螞蟻般的勤勉，同心合意地工作，沒有任何個人財物，一切全歸眾人所有。」¹⁴

對於研究學問，熱羅尼莫絕非為己所好，而只當作一種靈修生活的操練，一個達至天主的方法。如此，他把自己的古典文學陶成，更完美地用於服務教會團體上。舉例說，他輔助教宗達瑪甦，而且始自阿文庭的小團體，便悉心教導婦女，尤其是授以希伯來文，引導保拉和歐多欽「從事翻譯者的搏鬥」，¹⁵ 確保她們能以原文誦讀和咏唱聖詠，這在當時而言，簡直是前所未聞。¹⁶

他貢獻出自己的學識為人服務，且認為學識為每個福傳者都是必需的。他這樣提醒自己的朋友乃頗齊安(Nepotianus)說：「司鐸的說話應從閱讀聖經中汲取精華。我不想你成為一個多言的演說家或江湖客，而是一個明白神聖道理(*mysterii*)，和透徹認識你天主訓導(*sacramentorum*)的人。不學無術的人說話最愛兜兜轉轉，用口快舌疾的話來搏取無經驗者的讚賞。不知羞恥的人常向別人講論連自己也不懂的事，因他有能力說服別人，便自充專家。」¹⁷

14 *Vita Malchi monachi captivi* 7,3: PL 23, 59-60; *Opere storiche e agiografiche*, a cura di B. Degórski, *Opere di Girolamo XV*, Città Nuova, Roma 2014, 196-199。

15 《艾斯德爾引言》2: PL 28, 1505。

16 參閱：《書信集》108,26: CSEL 55, 344-345。

17 《書信集》52, 8: CSEL 54, 428-429; 參閱：《上主的話》，60:

熱羅尼莫在白冷居住直至他於420年逝世，那是他一生最有成果和最充實的時期，完全用於研讀聖經，並忙於把舊約從希伯來原文翻譯過來的艱巨任務。與此同時，他又注釋了先知書、聖詠集和保祿書信，及寫了些聖經導讀。他的作品由許多珍貴的工作匯聚而成，是大家研討和合作的結果，包括抄寫和校勘抄本，以至反省和討論：「在研讀聖經時，我從不依賴個人的力量，（……）我習慣對自己以為知道的事提出疑問，對於我不肯定的事，尤其如此。」¹⁸ 他既知道自己的限度，遂不斷請求別人以祈禱來支持他，好能按「使這些書寫成的同一聖神」，¹⁹ 翻譯出這些聖經書卷；與此同時，他也不忘翻譯對釋經工作不可少的書籍，如奧利振的著作等，「讓有意深究這門科學的人有所參考。」²⁰

熱羅尼莫的學術成就，來自他在團體內共付的努力，這也是為服務團體而做的。這合力協作模式也適於我們、我們這個時代及教會內不同的文化機構，好常能成為「把學問轉化成服務的地方，因為沒有了由合作而來並引導至合作的學問，便沒有真正和全面的人性發展。」²¹ 這個共融的基礎就是聖經，那是我們不能獨自研讀的：「聖經是天主子民

《宗座公報》102 (2010), 739。

18 *Praef. Paralipomenon LXX*, 1.10-15: *SCh* 592, 340。

19 《梅瑟五書引言》: *PL* 28, 184。

20 《書信集》80, 3: *CSEL* 55, 105。

21 *Messaggio in occasione della XXIV solenne Seduta pubblica delle Pontificie Accademie*, 4 dicembre 2019: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 dicembre 2019, p. 8。

在聖神的默感下，為天主子民而寫的。只有與這天主子民共融一致，我們才能真正以『自家人』的身分，走進天主願意告訴我們的真理的核心。」²²

那以天主聖言為滋養的健全生活經驗，令熱羅尼莫透過頻密的書信活動，成了一位靈修導師。他在靈修旅途上陪伴他人，因為他深信「沒有人能無師自通的」，就如他在寫給魯斯提苛（*Rusticus*）的信上說的，「我希望你能明白：我像一位有多次覆舟經驗的水手一樣，牽著你的手，教導你這個新手去航海。」²³ 他在這寧靜的角落裡，陪伴著人類度過世界大劇變的時代：410年羅馬屠城的慘劇，令他深受打擊。

他以書信方式來應付教義上的爭議，但常是為了維護正確的信仰。他在信中剛柔並用，但全情投入，由此可見他是個懂得與人相處的人，卻不會只求討人喜歡，明白到「愛情無價」，²⁴ 為此他以真誠和熱情待人。他關心到生活和工作的周遭情況，這點在他怎樣把自己的翻譯和聖經注釋，當作「友情饋贈」（*munus amicitiae*）貢獻出來，可見一斑。這首先是一份送給朋友的禮物，這些人是他的寫作和題獻的對象，他亦要求他們以朋友而非評論家的眼光來閱讀；其次這也是為其他讀者、當代人和各時代的人而寫的。²⁵

22 《上主的話》宗座勸諭，30: 《宗座公報》102 (2010), 709。

23 《書信集》125,15.2: *CSEL* 56, 133.120。

24 《書信集》3,6: *CSEL* 54, 18。

25 參閱：《若蘇厄書引言》1, 9-12: *SCh* 592, 316。

他生命的最後幾年，全用於個人和團體的聖經誦禱和默觀，並透過寫作為弟兄姊妹們服務。這一切都是白冷靠近聖言生於童貞聖母的山洞旁所完成的，他知道誰「在自己心中常懷著基督的十字架、復活、出生地和升天之處，那人便是有福的！誰在心中有白冷，讓基督每天在他心中誕生，那人才實在有福！」²⁶

從智慧的角度看熱羅尼莫的一生

為更透徹了解聖熱羅尼莫的為人，我們必須把他信友生活的兩個特質連結起來：一方面，是他絕對和毫不鬆懈地獻身於天主，且為了愛被釘的基督，而棄絕一切人性的安慰（參閱：格前2:2；斐3:8, 10）；另一方面，是他全神貫注於一絲不苟的研究，只是為了更全面地領略天主的奧秘。正為了聖熱羅尼莫所作的令人稱奇的雙重見證，他成了我們的模範：首先是為那度克苦和祈禱生活的修道人，促使他們能不畏艱辛，致力一絲不苟的研究和反思；其次是為學者們，他們要謹記：他們的學識若要有益於他們的信仰，就必出於絕對為愛天主而作，摒除一切人性的野心和世俗的欲望。

這些特質已被溶入歷史和藝術的範疇內，聖熱羅尼莫的形像在它們中屢見不鮮：西方的畫藝大師留下了他們描繪的傑作。我們可按這些畫作的類型，把

²⁶ 聖詠96(95)講道: PL 26, 1181; 參閱: S. Girolamo, 59 *Omellie sui Salmi* (1-115), a cura di A. Capone, *Opere di Girolamo IX/1*, Città Nuova, Roma 2018, 357。

它們分成兩個分明的路線。其中之一，尤其把他描繪成一位修道人和悔罪者，帶著一副因守齋而消瘦的身軀，退隱在曠野，雙膝跪在地上或俯伏於地；又多次見到他手拿石頭來捶胸，雙眼注視著十字架上的基督。在這類型中，要數現存梵蒂岡畫廊的達文西 (Leonardo da Vinci) 的感人傑作。另一個描繪聖熱羅尼莫的類型，把他畫成一位學者，坐在書桌前，埋頭翻譯和注釋聖經，周圍放著書冊和羊皮紙；他身負重任，以思想和寫作來維護信仰。這類型中著名的代表是丟勒 (Albrecht Dürer)，多次以這種姿態來描繪他。

上述兩個特點在卡拉瓦喬 (Caravaggio) 的畫布上被融匯為一，這畫作現珍藏羅馬博蓋塞畫廊 (Borghese Gallery)：在那單一畫面內，這位年老的苦修者，全身披著一塊紅布，桌上放著象徵世事虛幻的頭顱骨；畢竟他顯然也帶著一位學者的特徵，雙目注視著書冊，手持一支蘸在墨水瓶中的羽毛管筆，顯出一位作家的風範。

我們要從這可稱為智慧類型的角度，去理解熱羅尼莫一生的雙重特徵。在尋求他準備不惜一切去服務的真理時，有時他會像真的「白冷獅子」般，使用過激的言詞。他在首部著作《底比斯首位隱修士聖保祿傳》 (*Vita S. Pauli primi eremitae*) 中親自解釋說，獅子能發出「巨吼」，也能流淚。²⁷ 為了這

²⁷ 參閱: 《底比斯首位隱修士聖保祿傳》 16,2: PL 23, 28; *Opere storiche e agiografiche*, cit., 111。

原故，他在畫中出現的兩種對立造形，其實是聖神使這些特質在他身上渾然一體。

熱愛聖經

聖熱羅尼莫靈修的特點，無疑就是他對教會在聖經內所承襲的天主聖言的熱愛。若說所有教會聖師，尤其基督徒時代初期者，都明顯由聖經汲取他們教導的內容，那麼熱羅尼莫便是更有系統地，而且以很獨特的方式這樣做的人。

近代釋經學者很欣賞聖經敘事和詩歌的技巧，尤其推崇它的表達手法；相反地，熱羅尼莫卻強調天主在聖經中以很卑微的方式啟示自己，而且聖經所用的希伯來文，較之於西塞羅優雅的拉丁文，是既粗獷而又原始的表達。因此，他絕非為了欣賞文詞的秀麗而專注於聖經，卻如眾所周知的，只因聖經領他認識基督，因為不認識聖經，就是不認識基督。²⁸

熱羅尼莫教導我們，不僅只研讀福音，或只注釋載於宗徒大事錄和書信中的宗徒傳統，因為整個舊約為深入基督的真理和豐饒，也是不可或缺的。²⁹ 福音的話可茲見證：它告訴我們，身為師傅的耶穌，引用了梅瑟、先知和聖詠的話，來解釋祂的奧蹟（參閱：路4:16-21; 24:27, 44-47）。宗徒大事錄

28 參閱：《依撒意亞引言》PL 24, 17; S. Girolamo, *Commento a Isaia (1-4)*, a cura di R. Maisano, *Opere di Girolamo IV/1*, Città Nuova, Roma 2013, 52-53。

29 參閱：梵二，《啟示憲章》，14。

中的伯多祿和保祿，都特別根據舊約來宣講；沒有舊約，便不能完全明白天主聖子——救主默西亞的形像。舊約不應被視為用作引經據典的泉源，以證明先知的預言——在耶穌身上應驗過來；更徹底地說，反而只有在舊約「預像」的光照下，我們才能圓滿地理解，那在死亡和復活中完成的基督事件。因此，我們必須在教理講授和宣講中，以及在神學論述中，重估舊約不可少的貢獻，把它當作珍貴的滋養來閱讀和吸收。（參閱：則3:1-11；默10:8-11）³⁰

由他那些相似舊約先知的激烈說話，可見熱羅尼莫是如何完全獻身於聖經。我們這位聖師是由先知攝取那團內心的烈火，把它轉化成激烈和爆炸性的話（參閱：耶5:14; 20:9; 23:29；拉3:2；德48:1；瑪3:11；路12:49），以表達出這位一心為主的事業而努力的僕人的憂心如焚，那是不可少的。一如厄里亞、若翰洗者、以至保祿宗徒，熱羅尼莫對謊言、虛偽和虛假道理深惡痛恨，驅使他的言論變得帶有挑釁味及看似嚴苛。要明白他著作的爭辯特性，最好是把它當作仿效和實踐真正的先知傳統。熱羅尼莫是對真理不屈不撓的典型見證，責備之嚴厲全是為了導人悔改。他用詞和設譬之嚴苛，顯示這位僕人只願取悅他的主，而不是世人（迦1:10），他為主耗盡一切精力。

30 參閱：同上。

聖經研究

聖熱羅尼莫對聖經的熱愛是充滿服從的。首先是對天主的服從，因為天主要求人對祂的話人尊敬服從，³¹ 因而也要服從那些代表教會的生活傳統去解釋啟示道理的人。但這種「信德的服從」（羅 1:5; 16:26），並不純是一個對已知真理的被動接受；相反地，它也要求人主動地尋求理解。我們可以視聖熱羅尼莫是個忠信而勤奮的聖言僕役，完全獻身協助信仰中的弟兄姊妹，使他們對所接受的神聖「寶庫」，能有一個極正確的理解（參閱：弟前 6:20；弟後 1:14）。人若不明白那受默感的作者所寫的話，天主的話便會失去效用（參閱：瑪 13:19），不能結出愛天主的果實。

就當時來說，聖經的文字並不是時常可以直接接觸得到的。引用依撒意亞所說的話（9:11），即使是對那些「識字」的人——即那些受過充足教育的人——聖經的書卷仿如「封了印」般，無法理解。所以需要一位有能力的見證相助，帶來開釋的鑰匙，此即主基督，那唯一可以解開封印和開啟書卷者（參閱：默 5:1-10），這樣才可以揭示恩寵的奇妙湧流（參閱：路 4:17-21）。再者，熱心教友當中也有不少人表明不識閱讀聖經（參閱：依 29:12），非因他們不識字，而是因為不懂聖經的表達方式及古代的文化傳統，因此聖經的文字變得難以破解，就好像用了一種未知的字母，及一種隱

31 參閱：同上，7。

晦的語言寫成一樣。

因此，我們需要詮釋者作媒介，行使他的「服務」職能，協助那些不懂得先知話語的人。我們可借用斐理伯執事的經歷，來描寫這情況：他被上主推動，前去邂逅那位坐在馬車上閱讀依撒意亞先知書（53:7-8）的太監，因為他無法理解經書的話。「斐理伯問他說：你明白所誦讀的嗎？他答說：若沒有人指教我，怎麼能夠？」（宗 8:30-31）³²

熱羅尼莫是我們的嚮導，不但因為他像斐理伯一樣（參閱：宗 8:35），引導每位讀者認識耶穌的奧蹟，而且也因為熱羅尼莫忠於職守，有系統地為我們釋經及講解文化，好能正確而有益地理解所讀的聖經。³³ 除認識歷代的釋經著作外，他還精通傳遞天主聖言所用的文字，精確分析和估量聖經各抄卷，準確的考古研究，以及一切當代可用的方法，他都採用了，而且是一致而明智地運用了，好能對受默感寫成的經書，有一個正確的理解。

聖熱羅尼莫這個藉得取法的特點，對今日教會非常重要。正如《啟示憲章》所說的，聖經是「神學的靈魂」，³⁴ 又是實踐信友生活的精神支柱，³⁵ 那麼解釋聖經的任務，便須有專門的技能來相助。

32 參閱：熱羅尼莫《書信集》 53,5: CSEL 54, 451; *Le lettere*, a cura di S. Cola, II, Città Nuova, Roma 1997, 54。

33 參閱：梵二，《啟示憲章》，12。

34 參閱：梵二，《啟示憲章》，24。

35 參閱：梵二，《啟示憲章》，25。

一些優秀的聖經研究中心（例如：羅馬宗座聖經學院、耶路撒冷道明會聖經學院和方濟會聖經學院），及教父學中心（例如：羅馬聖奧思定學院），正是為達致這目的而設立，但每所神學院也應切法確保所教授的聖經科目，能令學生在釋經學和聖經神學的整合上，充分獲得解釋聖經的能力。可惜，由於許多人缺乏對聖經的基本知識，致使聖經的富饒被忽視或置之不理。為此，除加強司鐸和教理導師的教會培訓，讓他們在聖經學方面獲得應有的能力外，也應推行普及所有信友的培育，使各人都能打開聖經，從中汲取智慧、希望和生命等無可估量的果實。³⁶

在這點上，我想用前任教宗在《上主的話》宗座勸諭中的話提醒大家：「聖言的聖事特性，可與基督在已祝聖的餅酒形下的真實臨在作類比。我們走到祭台前分享感恩聖宴，實在領受基督的體血。要在禮儀中宣佈天主聖言，就必須承認基督親自臨在，並向我們說話，而且他願意被人聆聽。聖熱羅尼莫談及我們領受感恩聖事和天主聖言時應有的態度說：『我們誦讀聖經，對我來說，福音就是基督的身體；聖經就是基督的教導。當基督說：你們若不吃我的肉，不喝我的血時（參閱：若6:53），這話雖亦可指（感恩）奧蹟而言，但基督的體血就是聖經的話，就是天主的訓誨。』」³⁷

36 參閱：梵二，《啟示憲章》，21。

37 N. 56; 參閱：詠147: CCL 78, 337-338; S. Girolamo, 59 *Omellie sui Salmi* (119-149), a cura di A. Capone, *Opere di Girolamo IX/2*, Città

可惜的是在許多教友家庭中，無人自覺有能力——如同梅瑟法律所訓示的（參閱：申6:6-7——令子女認識上主的話，並指出它的優美和精神力量。為了這個原故，我定立了「天主聖言主日」，³⁸以促進在祈禱中閱讀聖經及熟習天主的話。³⁹如此，所有其他宗教虔敬行為便富有意義，各按應有的價值優次，導人於信德的巔峰：絕對堅信基督的奧蹟。

拉丁通行本

熱羅尼莫學習希臘文和希伯來文這「辛苦耕耘所得的最甘飴成果」，⁴⁰就是由希伯來原文把舊約翻譯成拉丁文。直至當時為止，羅馬帝國內的基督徒，只能以希臘文閱讀全部聖經。新約經書原以希臘文寫成，而舊約經書也有完整的希臘譯本，即所謂「七十賢士譯本」（*Septuaginta*），那是埃及亞歷山大城的猶太人團體約於主前二世紀完成翻譯的。但為拉丁文的讀者，卻沒有他們語文的完整聖經譯本，只有按希臘版本的部分及不完整的譯文。多得熱羅尼莫及繼他的後人，著手修訂及重新把整部聖經翻譯過來。在教宗達瑪甦的鼓勵下，熱羅尼莫在羅馬已著手修訂福音和聖詠的譯文，及至他來到白冷後，更開始直接由希伯來原文翻譯全部舊約經書：這工作經多年才告完成。

Nuova, Roma 2018, 171。

38 參閱：《開啟他們的明悟》自動手諭，2019年9月30日。

39 參閱：《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，152, 175:《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1083-1084.1093。

40 參閱：《書信集》52, 3: CSEL 54, 417。

為完成這翻譯工作，熱羅尼莫運用了他對希臘文和希伯來文的知識，不用說還有他扎實的拉丁文培育。他也採用了已有的語文學工具，尤其是奧利振的舊約六文對照本（*Hexapla*）。這翻譯的最後文本，一方面採用了當時常用的表述方式，同時又盡量保留了希伯來文的語風，但仍不失拉丁文的高雅。所得成果實為一部影響西方文化歷史的巨著，塑造出一套西方的神學用語。克服了一些起初對它的抗拒後，熱羅尼莫的譯本迅速成為學者與一般信友的共同遺產，因而被稱為「拉丁通行本」（*Vulgata*）。⁴¹ 中世紀時期的歐洲，大家都學會用熱羅尼莫的聖經譯文來讀經、祈禱和作論證。如此，「聖經成了一個『浩瀚的詞彙』（克洛岱爾P. Claudel）和『圖像集』（夏加爾M. Chagall）。」⁴² 文學、藝術，以至民間用語，都經常採用熱羅尼莫的拉丁譯本，留給後世許多優美和虔敬的瑰寶。

有鑒於這不爭的事實，特倫多大公會在其《再者》（*Insuper*）訓令中，確認拉丁通行本為「欽定本」，明認它多世紀以來應用於教會，並證實它用作研究、宣講和公開討論上的價值。⁴³ 畢竟它並非為削弱聖經原文的價值，就如熱羅尼莫自

41 參閱：《上主的話》宗座勸諭，72:《宗座公報》102 (2010), 746-747。

42 聖若望保祿二世，《致藝術家書》（*Lettera agli artisti*）（1999年4月4日），5:《宗座公報》91 (1999), 1159-1160。

43 參閱：《天主教會訓導文獻》Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1506。

己也不厭其煩地提到，將來更不會阻止人着手全新翻譯聖經。教宗聖保祿六世秉承梵二教長們的指示，希望拉丁通行本譯文的修訂工作能早日完成，以供教會上下應用。教宗聖若望保祿二世遂於1979年以他的《聖經寶庫》（*Scripturarum thesaurus*）宗座憲令，⁴⁴ 頒布了名為《新拉丁通行本》（*Neovulgata*）的標準版。

翻譯如同本位化

熱羅尼莫以他的翻譯，成功把聖經在拉丁語及拉丁文化中「本位化」，他這個努力成了教會傳教的恆常模式。事實上，「每當一個團體接受救恩的信息時，聖神就以福音轉化的力量豐裕其文化。」⁴⁵ 這樣便建立起一種循環：就如熱羅尼莫的翻譯是借助古典拉丁的語言和文化而成，並留下清晰可見的痕跡，同樣這翻譯以它的言詞及所包含的象徵和想像，到頭來又成了創建文化的元素。

熱羅尼莫的翻譯工作告訴我們，每個文化內的價值和正向形式都能充實教會。包含並活現於每個新翻譯內的宣講天主聖言的不同方式，都令聖經變得更充實，因為借用大額我略著名的話來說，聖經跟它的讀者一起成長，⁴⁶ 多個世紀以來，不斷獲得新的腔調和音色。把聖經和福音注入不同的文化內，

44 1979年4月25日:《宗座公報》LXXI (1979), 557-559。

45 《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，116:《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1068。

46 《厄則克耳講道》I, 7: PL 76, 843D。

令教會潛移默化，仿如不斷「佩帶珍珠的新娘」（*sponsa ornata monilibus suis*）（依61:10）。這同時也說明了，聖經需要不停翻譯成每個文化和世代所用的語言和思想表述方式，包括我們現今全球一體的世俗文化在內。⁴⁷

曾有人很合理地指出，我們可把被稱為語言款客的翻譯行為，與另一種款客形式作類比。⁴⁸ 為此，翻譯行為不單是語言上的問題，事實上，它相應於一種更廣泛的道德抉擇，與整個生活願景有關。沒有了翻譯，不同的語言團體之間便無法溝通；我們彼此關閉了歷史的門戶，把建立一個文化交流的可能性拒諸門外。⁴⁹ 實在，沒有了翻譯，又何來好客之道？反而只會加強敵意行為。翻譯者是搭建橋梁的人。多少武斷、多少指責和衝突的產生，都是由於我們不認識對方的語言，卻又沒有堅定的希望，採取翻譯這種用之不盡的愛心表現！

連熱羅尼莫也要面對當代的主流思想。羅馬帝國建立之初，希臘文仍相當普及，但在他的時代，這已變成罕有例子。畢竟他要算當時最熟諳希臘語和基督徒希臘文著作的人，何況他更踏上學習希伯來文這更艱苦的無人之旅。假若真如人所說的，「我語

47 參閱：《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，116:《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1068。

48 參閱：P. Ricœur, *Sur la traduction*, Bayard, Paris 2004。

49 參閱：《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，24:《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1029-1030。

言的限度，就是我世界的限度，」⁵⁰ 那麼我們可以說，我們必須歸功聖熱羅尼莫的多語言技能，讓我們能對基督信仰有一個更普世性的認識，同時又能更忠於原著。

慶祝聖熱羅尼莫逝世週年之際，天主聖言已被譯成三千多種語言，這使我們意識到一股非常活躍的傳教行動。一些文法、字典和其他語文工具的面世，全賴許多傳教士的努力，使人與人之間的溝通有了基礎，並成了實現「接觸一切人的傳教夢想」的媒介。⁵¹ 我們必須重視這一切努力，並為此投放資源，協助人們克服無法溝通的障礙和缺乏相遇的機會。尚有許多事情等著我們做。正如上面已說過的，沒有翻譯，便沒有理解：⁵² 我們不能認識自己，也不能認識別人。

熱羅尼莫與伯多祿宗座

熱羅尼莫一直與羅馬有不解之緣：他屢次回到這個精神港口；羅馬給了他人文主義的培育，也陶成了他的基督徒生活；他是不折不扣的「羅馬人」（*homo romanus*）。這個特殊連繫首先來自這城的語言，即他所擅長並深愛的拉丁文；但尤其來自他與羅馬教會的關係，特別是與伯多祿宗座的關係。帶有時代錯誤的畫藝傳統，把他繪成一位紅衣樞

50 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 5.6。

51 《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，31:《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1033。

52 參閱：G. Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford University Press, New York 1975。

機，以示他是教宗達瑪甦身邊的羅馬聖職班一員。他在羅馬開始了修訂聖經的拉丁譯本。即使他後來因被人嫉妬和誤解，被迫離開了羅馬，他仍經常與伯多祿宗座保持堅實的連繫。

對熱羅尼莫來說，羅馬教會是基督的種子產生豐碩成果的肥沃土地。⁵³ 在一個動蕩的時期，教會那件渾然無縫的長衣，多次被基督徒的分裂所扯破，熱羅尼莫卻視伯多祿宗座為穩固的基準：「我不跟隨任何人，只跟隨基督，我與伯多祿宗座聯繫共融。我知道教會是建基於這磐石上的。」與亞略異端派爭論激烈之際，他寫信給達瑪甦說：「誰不跟你聚攏的，就要失散；誰不屬於基督的，便屬假基督。」⁵⁴ 為此，他更肯定說：「誰與伯多祿宗座聯繫，就是我的朋友。」⁵⁵

熱羅尼莫常為了信仰而牽涉於激烈的爭辯中。他酷愛真理，熱切維護基督，這似乎已使他在書信和寫作中用上過激的言詞。其實他生性平和：「我也願有和平；我不僅切望，更是懇切祈求和平！但我所要的是基督的和平，真正的和平，一個沒有積怨的和平，一個不心懷惡鬥的和平；不是那種壓服敵人而來的和平，而是那結合於友誼的和平！」⁵⁶

我們的世界越來越需要慈悲和共融的靈藥。我要再

53 參閱：《書信集》15,1: CSEL 54, 63。

54 參閱：《書信集》15,2: CSEL 54, 62-64。

55 參閱：《書信集》16,2: CSEL 54, 69。

56 參閱：《書信集》82,2: CSEL 55, 109。

一次呼籲：讓我們作出友愛共融的輝煌及具吸引力的見證。⁵⁷ 「如果你們之間彼此相親相愛，世人因此就可認出你們是我的門徒。」（若13:35）耶穌以懇切的祈禱向父祈求說：「願他們在我們內合而為一（……），為叫世界相信。」（若17:21）

愛熱羅尼莫所愛

在結束這封書函前，我願再向大家作一個呼籲。在後人稱頌聖熱羅尼莫的眾多頌詞中，有人不僅視他為博覽基督徒「圖書館」的最偉大學者，歷代的信友都從這圖書館汲取滋養，而其中為首的就是聖經這瑰寶。我們還可以把他的論乃頗齊安的話套用在他自己身上：「勤讀聖經和不斷默想，使他的心成了一個基督的圖書館。」⁵⁸ 熱羅尼莫為了充實自己的圖書館不遺餘力，常視之為明白信仰和靈修生活不可少的工場；在這方面，他為現代的人也是個傑出的模範。但他更進一步。對他來說，求學不止於青年受培育的時代，而是個終身事業，是他一生每日的優先本分。我們可以說，他吸收了整個圖書館，然後把學識分施給眾人。四世紀時，遠道前來東方追尋隱修運動的普斯杜米安（Postumianus），是熱羅尼莫生活方式的目擊證人，曾住在他那裡幾個月，並論及他說：「熱羅尼莫全神貫注地閱讀，整個沉浸在書卷中，晝不眠，夜不寢；常在讀書或寫

57 參閱：《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，99: 《宗座公報》105 (2013), 1061。

58 《書信集》60, 10: CSEL 54, 561。

作。」⁵⁹

論到這事，我設想到今日如果一個青年人走進市內書店，或在互聯網頁上搜尋宗教書籍一欄，究竟會遇到什麼。即使他真能找到這多數設在周邊外的一欄，仍難以找到些有分量的作品。青年人搜尋這些書架或瀏覽這些網頁時，是很難明白為何研究宗教道理能成為某些人熱衷的事業，致令他全情投入；多個世紀至今，對天主的渴望為何能灼熱這些偉人的心靈；靈修生活的成長，為何能影響神學家、藝術家和詩人、史學家和科學家。今日的問題之一，不只是在宗教方面，而是文化上的無知：那可靠地解釋和翻譯我們文化傳統的詮釋能力，實在難能可貴。我想尤其對青年人提出一個挑戰：請你們開始尋找自己的文化遺產。基督信仰使你們繼承了一個無與倫比的文化遺產，那是你們所應把持的。你們應傾慕自己所擁有的歷史。你們要放膽注視著那位年青和焦燥不安的熱羅尼莫，他正如耶穌說的比喻中那個人，變賣了自己所有的一切，好能擁有「那顆寶貴的珍珠。」（瑪13:46）

實在，熱羅尼莫是「基督的圖書館」，一間永恆的圖書館，十六多個世紀以來，一直教導我們基督的愛有什麼意思：這愛與跟他的聖言邂逅是分不開的。為此這個一千六百週年紀念，號召我們去愛熱羅尼莫所愛的，重新發現他著作的價值，並讓自己被他的精神觸動。這精神的核心，基本上可形容

⁵⁹ Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogus* I, 9, 5: *SCh* 510, 136-138。

為：焦灼想望對自我啟示的天主有一個更深刻的認識。昔日熱羅尼莫不停對他當代的人大聲疾呼說：「你要時常誦讀聖經；更好說，你對聖經應愛不釋手。」我們今日怎能不聽從他這話呢？⁶⁰

熱羅尼莫提及最光輝的典範就是童貞瑪利亞，尤其是她的童貞母性，以及她在祈禱中讀經的態度。瑪利亞在心中默思（參閱：路2:19, 51），「因為她是神聖的，而且她誦讀聖經，認識先知，記得加俾額爾天使向她宣告的事，以及先知們所預告的事，（……）她看見自己新生的小兒子，那躺在馬槽中哭啼的唯一獨生子，但她實在知道，躺在那裡的就是天主聖子。她把所見的和她的所讀過和所聽到的作比較。」⁶¹ 讓我們把自己託付給她，她比任何人更能教導我們如何誦讀、默想、祈禱和默觀天主，這天主從不厭倦臨於我們的生活中。

發自羅馬聖若望拉特朗大殿

2020年9月30日，聖熱羅尼莫紀念日，本人在任第八年。

教宗方濟各

（天主教台灣地區主教團及香港教區合譯）

⁶⁰ 《書信集》52,7: *CSEL* 54, 426。

⁶¹ 聖誕講道IV: *PL Suppl.* 2, 191。

APOSTOLIC LETTER
SCRIPTURAE SACRAE AFFECTUS
 OF THE HOLY FATHER
FRANCIS
 ON THE SIXTEEN HUNDREDTH
 ANNIVERSARY
 OF THE DEATH OF SAINT JEROME

Devotion to sacred Scripture, a “living and tender love” for the written word of God: this is the legacy that Saint Jerome bequeathed to the Church by his life and labours. Now, on the sixteen hundredth anniversary of his death, those words taken from the opening prayer of his liturgical Memorial give us an essential insight into this outstanding figure in the Church’s history and his immense love for Christ. That “living and tender love” flowed, like a great river feeding countless streams, into his tireless activity as a scholar, translator and exegete. Jerome’s profound knowledge of the Scriptures, his zeal for making their teaching known, his skill as an interpreter of texts, his ardent and at times impetuous defence of Christian truth, his asceticism and harsh eremitical discipline, his expertise as a generous and sensitive spiritual

¹ “*Deus qui beato Hieronymo presbitero suavem et vivum Scripturae Sacrae affectum tribuisti, da, ut populus tuus verbo tuo uberius alatur et in eo fontem vitae inveniet*”. *Collecta Missae Sanctae Hieronymi, Missale Romanum*, editio typica tertia, Civitas Vaticana, 2002.

guide – all these make him, sixteen centuries after his death, a figure of enduring relevance for us, the Christians of the twenty-first century.

Introduction

On 30 September 420, Saint Jerome died in Bethlehem, in the community that he had founded near the grotto of the Nativity. He thus entrusted himself to the Lord whom he had always sought and known in the Scriptures, the same Lord whom, as a Judge, he had already encountered in a feverish dream, possibly during the Lenten season of 375. That dream proved to be a decisive turning point in his life, an occasion of conversion and change in outlook. He saw himself dragged before the Judge. As he himself recalled: “Questioned about my state, I responded that I was a Christian. But the Judge retorted: ‘You lie! You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian’”.² Jerome had loved from his youth the limpid beauty of the Latin classics, whereas the writings of the Bible had initially struck him as uncouth and ungrammatical, too harsh for his refined literary taste.

That experience inspired Jerome to devote himself entirely to Christ and his word, and to strive through his translations and commentaries to make the divine writings increasingly accessible to others. It gave his life a new and more decisive orientation: he was to become a servant of the word of God, in love, as it were, with the “flesh of Scripture”. Thus, in the pursuit of knowledge that marked his entire life, he put to good use his youthful studies and Roman education, redirecting his scholarship to the greater service of God and

² *Epistula* (hereafter *Ep.*) 22, 30: CSEL 54, 190.

the ecclesial community.

As a result, Saint Jerome became one of the great figures of the ancient Church in the period known as the golden age of patristics. He served as a bridge between East and West. A youthful friend of Rufinus of Aquileia, he knew Ambrose and was frequently in correspondence with Augustine. In the East, he knew Gregory of Nazianzus, Didymus the Blind and Epiphanius of Salamis. The Christian iconographic tradition presents him, in the company of Augustine, Ambrose and Gregory the Great, as one of the four great Doctors of the Western Church.

My predecessors have honoured Saint Jerome on various occasions. A century ago, on the fifteenth centenary of his death, Benedict XV dedicated his Encyclical Letter *Spiritus Paraclitus* (15 September 1920) to Jerome, presenting him to the world as “*doctor maximus explanandis Scripturis*”.³ More recently, Benedict XVI devoted two successive catecheses to his person and works.⁴ Now on the 1600th anniversary of his death, I too desire to commemorate Saint Jerome and to emphasize once more the timeliness of his message and teachings, beginning with his immense love for the Scriptures.

Indeed, as a sure guide and authoritative witness, Jerome in some sense dominated both the XII Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to the Word of God,⁵ and the Apostolic

³ AAS 12 (1920), 385-423.

⁴ Cf. General Audiences of 7 and 14 November 2007: *Insegnamenti*, III, 2 (2007), 553-556; 586-591.

⁵ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly, *Message*

Exhortation *Verbum Domini* of my predecessor Benedict XVI, published on the feast day of the Saint, 30 September 2010.⁶

From Rome to Bethlehem

The journey of Saint Jerome's life traversed the roads of the Roman Empire between Europe and the East. Born around 345 in Stridon, on the border between Dalmatia and Pannonia, in present-day Croatia and Slovenia, he received a solid upbringing in a Christian family. As was the custom in those times, he was baptized as an adult sometime between 358 and 364, while studying rhetoric in Rome. During his Roman sojourn, he became an insatiable reader of the Latin classics, studying under the most celebrated teachers of rhetoric then living.

Following his studies, he undertook a long journey through Gaul, which brought him to the imperial city of Trier, now in Germany. There he first encountered Eastern monasticism as disseminated by Saint Athanasius. The result was a deep and enduring desire for that experience, which led him to Aquileia, where, with a few of his friends, “a choir of the blessed”,⁷ he inaugurated a period of life in common.

Around the year 374, passing through Antioch, he decided to retire to the desert of Chalcis, in order to realize in an ever more radical manner an ascetical life in which great space was reserved for the study of the biblical languages, first

to the People of God (24 October 2008).

⁶ Cf. AAS 102 (2010), 681-787.

⁷ *Chronicum* 374: PL 27, 697-698

Greek and then Hebrew. He studied under a Christianized Jew who introduced him to the knowledge of Hebrew and its sounds, which he found “harsh and aspirate”.⁸

Jerome consciously chose the desert and the eremitic life for their deeper meaning as a locus of fundamental existential decisions, of closeness and encounter with God. There, through contemplation, interior trials and spiritual combat, he came to understand more fully his own weakness, his own limits and those of others. There too, he discovered the importance of tears.⁹ The desert taught him sensitivity to God’s presence, our necessary dependence on him and the consolations born of his mercy. Here, I am reminded of an apocryphal story in which Jerome asks the Lord: “What do you want of me?” To which Christ replies: “You have not yet given me everything”. “But Lord, I have given you all sorts of things”. “One thing you have not given me”. “What is that?” “Give me your sins, so that I may rejoice in forgiving them once more”.¹⁰

We then find him in Antioch, where he was ordained a priest by the bishop of that city, Paulinus, and later, about 379, in Constantinople, where he met Gregory of Nazianzus and continued his studies. He translated from Greek into Latin several important works (the homilies of Origen and the Chronicle of Eusebius) and was present for the Council celebrated there in 381. Those years of study revealed his

⁸ *Ep.* 125, 12: CSEL 56, 131.

⁹ Cf. *Ep.* 122, 3: CSEL 56, 63.

¹⁰ Cf. *Morning Meditation*, 10 December 2015. The anecdote is related in A. LOUF, *Sotto la guida dello Spirito*, Qiqiaion, Mangano (BI), 1990, 154-155.

generous enthusiasm and a blessed thirst for knowledge that made him tireless and passionate in his work. As he put it: “From time to time I despaired; often I gave up, but then I went back out of a stubborn will to learn”. The “bitter seed” of his studies was to produce “savory fruits”.¹¹

In 382, Jerome returned to Rome and placed himself at the service of Pope Damasus who, appreciating his outstanding gifts, made him one of his close associates. There Jerome engaged in a constant activity, without however neglecting spiritual matters. On the Aventine, supported by aristocratic Roman women intent on a radically evangelical life, like Marcella, Paula and her daughter Eustochium, he created a cenacle devoted to the reading and the rigorous study of Scripture. Jerome acted as exegete, teacher and spiritual guide. At this time, he undertook a revision of the earlier Latin translations of the Gospels and perhaps other parts of the New Testament as well. He continued his work of translating Origen’s homilies and biblical commentaries, engaged in a flurry of letter writing, publically refuted heretical writers, at times intemperately but always moved by the sincere desire to defend the true faith and the deposit of Scripture.

This intense and productive period was interrupted by the death of Pope Damasus. Jerome found himself forced to leave Rome and, followed by friends and some women desirous of continuing the experience of spiritual life and biblical study already begun, left for Egypt, where he met the great theologian Didymus the Blind. He then travelled to Palestine and in 386 settled definitively in Bethlehem. He resumed his

¹¹ Cf. *Ep.* 125, 12: CSEL 56, 131.

study of the biblical texts, texts now anchored in the very places of which they spoke.

The importance he attributed to the holy places is seen not only by his decision to live in Palestine from 386 until his death, but also by the assistance he gave to pilgrims. In Bethlehem, a place close to his heart, he founded in the environs of the grotto of the Nativity, “twin” monasteries, male and female, with hospices to provide lodging for pilgrims to the holy places. This was yet another sign of his generosity, for he made it possible for many others to see and touch the places of salvation history, and to find both cultural and spiritual enrichment.¹²

In his attentive listening to the Scriptures, Jerome came to know himself and to find the face of God and of his brothers and sisters. He was also confirmed in his attraction to community life. His desire to live with friends, as he had in Aquileia, led him to establish monastic communities in order to pursue the cenobitic ideal of religious life. There, the monastery is seen as a “palaestra” for training men and women “who consider themselves least of all, in order to be first among all”, content with poverty and capable of teaching others by their own style of life. Jerome considered it a formative experience to live “under the governance of a single superior and in the company of many” in order to learn humility, patience, silence and meekness, in the awareness that “the truth does not love dark corners and does not seek grumblers”.¹³ He also confessed that he “yearned for the close

¹² Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 89: AAS 102 (2010), 761-762.

¹³ Cf. *Ep.* 125, 9.15.19: CSEL 56, 128.133-134.139.

cells of the monastery” and “desired the eagerness of ants, where all work together, nothing belongs to any individual, and everything belongs to everyone”.¹⁴

Jerome saw his studies not as a pleasant pastime and an end unto itself, but rather as a spiritual exercise and a means of drawing closer to God. His classical training was now directed to the deeper service of the ecclesial community. We think of the assistance he gave to Pope Damasus and his commitment to the instruction of women, especially in the study of Hebrew, from the time of the first cenacle on the Aventine. In this way, he enabled Paula and Eustochium to “enter the serried ranks of translators”,¹⁵ and, something unheard of in those days, to read and chant the Psalms in the original language.¹⁶

His great erudition was employed in offering a necessary service to those called to preach the Gospel. As he reminded his friend Nepotianus: “the word of the priest must be flavoured by the reading of Scripture. I do not wish that you be a disclaimer or charlatan of many words, but one who understands the sacred doctrine (*mysterii*) and knows deeply the teachings (*sacramentorum*) of your God. It is typical of the ignorant to play around with words and to garner the admiration of inexperienced people by speaking quickly. Those who are shameless often explain that which they do not know and pretend to be a great expert only because they succeed in persuading others”.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Vita Malchi monachi captivi*, 7, 3: PL 23, 59-60.

¹⁵ *Praefatio in Librum Esther*, 2: PL 28, 1505.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ep.* 108, 26: CSEL 55, 344-345.

¹⁷ *Ep.* 52, 8: CSEL 54, 428-429; cf. *Verbum Domini*, 60: AAS 102

Jerome's years in Bethlehem, to the time of his death in 420, were the most fruitful and intense period of his life, completely dedicated to the study of Scripture and to the monumental work of translating the entire Old Testament on the basis of the original Hebrew. At the same time, he commented on the prophetic books, the Psalms and the letters of Paul, and wrote guides to the study of the Bible. The deep learning that flowed over into his works was the fruit of a collaborative effort, from the copying and collating of manuscripts to further reflection and discussion. As he put it: "I have never ever trusted in my own powers to study the divine volumes... I have the habit of asking questions, also about that which I thought I knew and even more so about that of which I was not sure".¹⁸ Conscious of his limitations, he asked for constant prayer and intercession for his efforts to translate the sacred texts "in the same Spirit by whom they were written".¹⁹ Nor did he fail to translate works by authors indispensable for exegesis, such as Origen, "in order to make them available to those who would like to study this material more deeply and systematically".²⁰

As an enterprise carried out within the community and at the service of the community, Jerome's scholarly activity can serve as an example of synodality for us and for our own time. It can also serve as a model for the Church's various cultural institutions, called to be "places where knowledge becomes service, for no genuine and integral human development

(2010), 739.

18 *Praefatio in Librum Paralipomenon LXX*, 1.10-15: *Sources Chrétiennes* 592, 340.

19 *Praefatio in Pentateuchum*: PL 28, 184.

20 *Ep.* 80, 3: CSEL 55, 105.

can occur without a body of knowledge that is the fruit of cooperation and leads to greater cooperation".²¹ The basis of such communion is Scripture, which we cannot read merely on our own: "The Bible was written by the People of God for the People of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this communion with the People of God can we truly enter as a 'we' into the heart of the truth that God himself wishes to convey to us".²²

His solid experience of a life nurtured by the word of God enabled Jerome, through the many letters he wrote, to become a spiritual guide. He became a fellow traveller to many, for he was convinced that "no skill can be learned without a teacher". Thus he wrote to Rusticus: "This is what I would like to make you understand, taking you by the hand like an ancient mariner, the survivor of several shipwrecks, attempting to teach a young sailor".²³ From his peaceful corner of the world, he followed the course of human affairs in an age of great upheaval, marked by events like the sack of Rome in 410, which affected him deeply.

In those letters he dealt with doctrinal controversies, constantly in defence of sound doctrine. His letters also show the value he placed on relationships. Jerome could be forceful but also gentle, sincerely concerned for others, and, since "love is priceless",²⁴ enthusiastic in showing

21 *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-fourth Public Session of the Pontifical Academies*, 4 December 2019: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 December 2019, p. 8.

22 *Verbum Domini*, 30: AAS 102 (2010), 709.

23 *Ep.* 125, 15.2: CSEL 56, 133.120.

24 *Ep.* 3, 6: CSEL 54, 18.

genuine affection. This can also be seen from the fact that he offered his works of translation and commentary as a *munus amicitiae*. They were to be a gift above all for his friends, correspondents and those to whom his works were dedicated – all of whom he begged to read them with a friendly rather than a critical eye – but also for his readers, his contemporaries and those who would come after them.²⁵

Jerome spent the last years of his life in the prayerful reading of Scripture, both privately and in community, in contemplation and in serving his brothers and sisters through his writings. All this in Bethlehem, near the grotto where the eternal Word was born of the Virgin Mary. For he was convinced that “they are blessed who bear within them the cross, the resurrection, the places of Christ’s nativity and ascension! Blessed are they who have Bethlehem in their heart, in whose heart Christ is born each day!”²⁶

The “sapiential” aspect of Jerome’s life

To understand Saint Jerome’s personality fully, we need to unite two dimensions that characterized his life as a believer: on the one hand, an absolute and austere consecration to God, renouncing all human satisfaction for love of Christ crucified (cf. 1 *Cor* 2:2; *Phil* 3:8.10), and on the other, a commitment to diligent study, aimed purely at an ever deeper understanding of the Christian mystery. This double witness, wondrously offered by Saint Jerome, can serve as a model above all for monks, since all who live a life of asceticism and prayer are urged to devote themselves to the exacting labour of research

²⁵ Cf. *Praefatio in Librum Iosue*, 1, 9-12: SCh 592, 316.

²⁶ *Homilia in Psalmum 95*: PL 26, 1181.

and reflection. It is likewise a model for scholars, who should always keep in mind that knowledge has religious value only if it is grounded in an exclusive love for God, apart from all human ambition and worldly aspiration.

These two aspects of his life have found expression in the history of art. Saint Jerome was frequently depicted by great masters of Western painting following two distinct iconographic traditions. One can be described as primarily monastic and penitential, showing Jerome with a body emaciated by fasting, living in the desert, kneeling or prostrate on the ground, in many cases clutching a rock and beating his breast, his eyes turned towards the crucified Lord. In this line, we find the moving masterpiece of Leonardo da Vinci now in the Vatican Museums. Another tradition shows Jerome in the garb of a scholar, seated at his writing desk, intent on translating and commenting on the sacred Scriptures, surrounded by scrolls and parchments, devoted to defending the faith through his erudition and his writings. Albrecht Dürer, to cite one famous example, portrayed him more than once in this pose.

The two aspects are brought together in the painting by Caravaggio located in the Borghese Gallery in Rome: indeed in a single scene the elderly ascetic is shown dressed simply in a red robe with a skull on his table, a symbol of the vanity of earthly realities; but at the same time he is evidently depicted as a scholar, his eyes fixed on a book as his hand dips a quill into an inkwell – the typical act of a writer.

These two “sapiential” aspects were very much evident in Jerome’s own life. If, as a true “Lion of Bethlehem”, he could

be violent in his language, it was always in the service of a truth to which he was unconditionally committed. As he explained in the first of his writings, the *Life of Saint Paul, Hermit of Thebes*, lions can roar but also weep.²⁷ What might at first appear as two separate aspects of Saint Jerome's character were joined by the Holy Spirit through a process of interior maturation.

Love for sacred Scripture

The distinctive feature of Saint Jerome's spirituality was undoubtedly his passionate love for the word of God entrusted to the Church in sacred Scripture. All the Doctors of the Church – particularly those of the early Christian era – drew the content of their teaching explicitly from the Bible. Yet Jerome did so in a more systematic and distinctive way.

Exegetes in recent times have come to appreciate the narrative and poetic genius of the Bible and its great expressive quality. Jerome instead emphasized in sacred Scripture the humble character of God's revelation, set down in the rough and almost primitive cadences of the Hebrew language in comparison to the refinement of Ciceronian Latin. He devoted himself to the study of sacred Scripture not for aesthetic reasons, but – as is well known – only because Scripture had led him to know Christ. Indeed, ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.²⁸

Jerome teaches us that not only should the Gospels and the apostolic Tradition present in the Acts of the Apostles and in

²⁷ Cf. *Vita S. Pauli primi eremitae*, 16, 2: PL 23, 28.

²⁸ Cf. *In Isaiam Prologus*: PL 24, 17.

the Letters be studied and commented on, but that the entire Old Testament is indispensable for understanding the truth and the riches of Christ.²⁹ The Gospel itself gives evidence of this: it speaks to us of Jesus as the Teacher who appeals to Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (cf. *Lk* 4:16-21; 24:27.44-47) in order to explain his own mystery. The preaching of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles is likewise rooted in the Old Testament, apart from which we cannot fully understand the figure of the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour. Nor should the Old Testament be thought of merely as a vast repertoire of citations that prove the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, only in light of the Old Testament prefigurements is it possible to know more profoundly the meaning of the Christ event as revealed in his death and resurrection. Today we need to rediscover, in catechesis and preaching, as well as in theological exposition, the indispensable contribution of the Old Testament, which should be read and digested as a priceless source of spiritual nourishment (cf. *Ez* 3:1-11; *Rev* 10:8-11).³⁰

Jerome's complete devotion to Scripture is shown by his impassioned way of speaking and writing, similar to that of the ancient prophets. From them, this Doctor of the Church drew the inner fire that became a vehement and explosive word (cf. *Jer* 5:14; 20:9; 23:29; *Mal* 3:2; *Sir* 48:1; *Mt* 3:11; *Lk* 12:49) necessary for expressing the burning zeal of one who serves the cause of God. As with Elijah, John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul, indignation at lies, hypocrisy and false

²⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 14.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

teaching inflamed Jerome's speech, making it provocative and seemingly harsh. We can better understand the polemical dimension of his writings if we read them in the light of the most authentic prophetic tradition. Jerome thus emerges as a model of uncompromising witness to the truth that employs the harshness of reproof in order to foster conversion. By the intensity of his expressions and images, he shows the courage of a servant desirous not of pleasing others, but his Lord alone (*Gal* 1:10), for whose sake he expended all his spiritual energy.

The study of sacred Scripture

Saint Jerome's impassioned love for the divine Scriptures was steeped in obedience. First, to God who revealed himself in words that demand a reverent hearing,³¹ and, then to those in the Church who represent the living Tradition that interprets the revealed message. The "obedience of faith" (*Rom* 1:5; 16:26) is not, however, a mere passive reception of something already known; on the contrary it demands an active personal effort to understand what was spoken. We can think of Saint Jerome as a "servant" of the word, faithful and industrious, entirely devoted to fostering in his brothers and sisters in faith a more adequate understanding of the sacred "deposit" entrusted to them (cf. *1 Tim* 6:20; *2 Tim* 1:14). Without an understanding of what was written by the inspired authors, the word of God itself is deprived of its efficacy (cf. *Mt* 13:19) and love for God cannot spring up.

Biblical passages are not always immediately accessible. As Isaiah said (29:11), even for those who know how to "read"

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 7.

– that is, those who have had a sufficient intellectual training – the sacred book appears "sealed", hermetically closed to interpretation. A witness is needed to intervene and provide the key to its liberating message, which is Christ the Lord. He alone is able to break the seal and open the book (cf. *Rev* 5:1-10) and in this way unveil its wondrous outpouring of grace (*Lk* 4:17-21). Many, even among practising Christians, say openly that they are not able to read it (cf. *Is* 29:12), not because of illiteracy, but because they are unprepared for the biblical language, its modes of expression and its ancient cultural traditions. As a result the biblical text becomes indecipherable, as if it were written in an unknown alphabet and an esoteric tongue.

This shows the need for the mediation of an interpreter, who can exercise a "diaconal" function on behalf of the person who cannot understand the meaning of the prophetic message. Here we think of the deacon Philip, sent by the Lord to approach the chariot of the eunuch who was reading a passage from Isaiah (53:7-8), without being able to unlock its meaning. "Do you understand what you are reading?" asked Philip, and the eunuch replied: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (*Acts* 8:30-31).³²

Jerome can serve as our guide because, like Philip (cf. *Acts* 8:35), he leads every reader to the mystery of Jesus, while responsibly and systematically providing the exegetical and cultural information needed for a correct and fruitful reading of the Scriptures.³³ In an integrated and skilful way

³² Cf. SAINT JEROME, *Ep.* 53, 5: CSEL 54, 451.

³³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 12.

he employed all the methodological resources available in his day – competence in the languages in which the word of God was handed down, careful analysis and examination of manuscripts, detailed archeological research, as well as knowledge of the history of interpretation – in order to point to a correct understanding of the inspired Scriptures.

This outstanding aspect of the activity of Saint Jerome is also of great importance for the Church in our own time. If, as *Dei Verbum* teaches, the Bible constitutes as it were “the soul of sacred theology”³⁴ and the spiritual support of the Christian life,³⁵ the interpretation of the Bible must necessarily be accompanied by specific skills.

Centres of excellence for biblical research – such as the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and the École Biblique and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem – and for patristic research, like the Augustinianum in Rome, certainly serve this purpose, but every Faculty of Theology should strive to ensure that the teaching of sacred Scripture is carried out in such a way that students are provided with necessary training in interpretative skills, both in the exegesis of texts and in biblical theology as a whole. Sadly, the richness of Scripture is neglected or minimized by many because they were not afforded a solid grounding in this area. Together with a greater emphasis on the study of Scripture in ecclesiastical programmes of training for priests and catechists, efforts should also be made to provide all the faithful with the resources needed to be able to open the sacred book and draw from it priceless fruits of wisdom, hope

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 25.

and life.³⁶

Here I would recall an observation made by Pope Benedict XVI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “The [sacramental nature] of the word can be understood by analogy with the real presence of Christ under the appearances of the consecrated bread and wine... Saint Jerome speaks of the way we ought to approach both the Eucharist and the word of God: ‘We are reading the sacred Scriptures. For me, the Gospel is the body of Christ; for me, the holy Scriptures are his teaching. And when he says: *whoever does not eat my flesh and drink my blood* (Jn 6:53), even though these words can also be understood of the [Eucharistic] Mystery, Christ’s body and blood are really the word of Scripture, God’s teaching”³⁷.

Sadly, many Christian families seem unable – as was prescribed in the Torah (cf. *Dt* 6:6) – to introduce their children to the word of the Lord in all its beauty and spiritual power. This led me to institute the Sunday of the Word of God³⁸ as a means of encouraging the prayerful reading of the Bible and greater familiarity with God’s word.³⁹ All other expressions of piety will thus be enriched with meaning, placed in their proper perspective and directed to the fulfilment of faith in complete adherence to the mystery of Christ.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

³⁷ N. 56; cf. *In Psalmum 147*: CCL 78, 337-338.

³⁸ Cf. Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Aperuit Illis*, 30 September 2019.

³⁹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 152.175: AAS 105 (2013), 1083-1084.1093.

The Vulgate

The “sweetest fruit of the arduous cultivation”⁴⁰ of Jerome’s study of Greek and Hebrew was his translation of the Old Testament into Latin from the original Hebrew. Up to that time, Christians of the Roman empire could read the Bible in its entirety only in Greek. The books of the New Testament had been written in Greek; a complete Greek version of the Old Testament also existed, the so-called Septuagint, the translation made by the Jewish community of Alexandria around the second century before Christ. Yet for readers of Latin, there was no complete version of the Bible in their language; only some partial and incomplete translations from the Greek. To Jerome and those who continued his work belongs the merit of undertaking a revision and a new translation of the whole of Scripture. Having begun the revision of the Gospels and the Psalms in Rome with the encouragement of Pope Damasus, Jerome, from his cell in Bethlehem, then started the translation of all the Old Testament books directly from the Hebrew. This work lasted for many years.

To complete this labour of translation, Jerome put to good use his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, as well as his solid training in Latin, employing the philological tools he had at his disposal, in particular Origen’s Hexapla. The final text united continuity in formulas by now in common use with a greater adherence to the Hebrew style, without sacrificing the elegance of the Latin language. The result was a true monument that marked the cultural history of the West,

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 52, 3: CSEL 54, 417.

shaping its theological language. Jerome’s translation, after initially encountering some rejection, quickly became the common patrimony of both scholars and ordinary believers; hence the name “Vulgate”.⁴¹ Medieval Europe learned to read, pray and think from the pages of the Bible translated by Jerome. In this way, “sacred Scripture became a sort of ‘immense lexicon’ (Paul Claudel) and ‘iconographic atlas’ (Marc Chagall), from which both Christian culture and art could draw”.⁴² Literature, art and even popular language have continually been shaped by Jerome’s translation of the Bible, leaving us great treasures of beauty and devotion.

It was due to this indisputable fact that the Council of Trent, in its decree *Insuper*, affirmed the “authentic” character of the Vulgate, thus attesting to its use in the Church through the centuries and bearing witness to its value as a tool for the purpose of study, preaching and public disputation.⁴³ Yet the Council did not seek to minimize the importance of the original languages, as Jerome never stopped insisting, much less forbid undertaking a comprehensive translation in the future. Saint Paul VI, following the indication of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, desired that the work of revising the Vulgate be brought to completion and placed at the service of the whole Church. Thus in 1979 Saint John Paul II, in the Apostolic Constitution *Scripturarum*

⁴¹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 72: AAS 102 (2010), 746-747.

⁴² SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists* (4 April 1999), 5: AAS 91 (1999), 1159-1160.

⁴³ Cf. DENZIGER-SCHÖNMETZNER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. 43, 1506.

Thesaurus,⁴⁴ promulgated the typical edition called the “Neo-Vulgate”.

Translation as inculturation

By his translation, Jerome succeeded in “inculturating” the Bible in the Latin language and culture. His work became a permanent paradigm for the missionary activity of the Church. In effect, “whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel”.⁴⁵ Here a kind of circularity is established: just as Jerome’s translation is indebted to the language and culture of classical Latin, whose influence is very evident, so his translation, by its language and its symbolic and highly imaginative content, became in turn an impetus to the creation of a new culture.

Jerome’s work of translation teaches us that the values and positive forms of every culture represent an enrichment for the whole Church. The different ways by which the word of God is proclaimed, understood and experienced in each new translation enrich Scripture itself since, according to the well-known expression of Gregory the Great, Scripture grows with the reader,⁴⁶ taking on new accents and new resonance throughout the centuries. The entrance of the Bible and the Gospel into different cultures renders the Church ever more clearly “a bride bedecked with jewels” (Is 61:10). At the same time it witnesses to the fact that the Bible continually needs to

44 25 April 1979: AAS 71 (1979), 557-559.

45 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116: AAS 105 (2013), 1068.

46 *Homilia in Ezechielem* I, 7: PL 76, 843D.

be translated into the linguistic and mental categories of each culture and generation, also in the secularized global culture of our time.⁴⁷

It has been rightly pointed out that an analogy exists between translation as an act of “linguistic” hospitality and other forms of hospitality.⁴⁸ This is why translation does not concern language alone but really reflects a broader ethical decision connected with an entire approach to life. Without translation, different linguistic communities would be unable to communicate among themselves; we would close the doors of history to one another and negate the possibility of building a culture of encounter.⁴⁹ In effect, without translation there can be no such hospitality; indeed hostility would increase. A translator is a bridge builder. How many hasty judgments are made, how many condemnations and conflicts arise from the fact that we do not understand the language of other persons and fail to apply ourselves, with firm hope, to the endless demonstration of love that translation represents.

Jerome too had to counter the dominant thought of his time. If the knowledge of Greek was relatively common at the dawn of the Roman Empire, by his time it was already becoming a rarity. He came to be one of the best experts in Greco-Christian language and literature and he undertook a still more arduous and solitary journey when he undertook the study of Hebrew. If, as it has been said, “the limits of

47 Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116: AAS 105 (2013), 1068.

48 Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Sur la traduction*, Paris, 2004.

49 Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24: AAS 105 (2013), 1029-1030.

my language are the limits of my world”⁵⁰, we can say that we owe to Saint Jerome’s knowledge of languages a more universal understanding of Christianity and one steeped more deeply in its sources.

With the celebration of this anniversary of the death of Saint Jerome, our gaze turns to the extraordinary missionary vitality expressed by the fact that the word of God has been translated into more than three thousand languages. To how many missionaries do we owe the invaluable publication of grammars, dictionaries and other linguistic tools that enable greater communication and become vehicles for “the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone”!⁵¹ We need to support this work and invest in it, helping to overcome limits in communication and lost opportunities for encounter. Much remains to be done. It has been said that without translation there can be no understanding:⁵² we would understand neither ourselves nor others.

Jerome and the Chair of Peter

Jerome always had a special relationship with the city of Rome: Rome was the spiritual haven to which he constantly returned. In Rome he was trained as a humanist and formed as a Christian; Jerome was a homo Romanus. This bond arose in a very particular way from the Latin language of which he was a master and which he deeply loved, but above all from

50 L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6.

51 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 31: AAS 105 (2013), 1033.

52 Cf. G. STEINER, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, New York, 1975.

the Church of Rome and especially the Chair of Peter. The iconographic tradition anachronistically depicts him wearing the robes of a cardinal as a sign of his being a priest of Rome under Pope Damasus. In Rome he began to revise the earlier translation. Even when jealousies and misunderstandings forced him to leave the city, he always remained strongly linked to the Chair of Peter.

For Jerome, the Church of Rome is the fertile ground where the seed of Christ bears abundant fruit.⁵³ At a turbulent time in which the seamless garment of the Church was often torn by divisions among Christians, Jerome looked to the Chair of Peter as a sure reference point. “As I follow no leader save Christ, so I communicate with none but Your Holiness, that is, with the Chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the rock on which the Church is built”. At the height of the controversy with the Arians, he wrote to Damasus: “He that does not gather with you scatters; he that is not of Christ is of antichrist”.⁵⁴ Consequently Jerome could also state: “He who is united to the Chair of Peter is one with me”.⁵⁵

Jerome was often involved in bitter disputes for the cause of the faith. His love for the truth and his ardent defence of Christ perhaps led him to an excess of verbal violence in his letters and writings. Yet he lived for peace: “I wish for peace as much as others; and not only do I wish for it, I ask for it. But the peace which I want is the peace of Christ; a true peace, a peace without rancour, a peace which does not involve war, a peace which will not reduce opponents but will

53 Cf. *Ep.* 15, 1: CSEL 54, 63.

54 *Ibid.*, 15, 2: CSEL 54, 62-64.

55 *Ibid.*, 16, 2: CSEL 54, 69.

unite friends”.⁵⁶

Today more than ever, our world needs the medicine of mercy and communion. Here I would like to say once again: let us offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion.⁵⁷ “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). This is what Jesus, with intense prayer, asked of the Father: “that they may all be one... in us... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

Loving what Jerome loved

At the conclusion of this Letter, I wish to address an appeal to everyone. Among the many tributes paid to Saint Jerome by later generations, one is that he was not simply one of the greatest scholars of the “library” from which Christianity was enriched over the course of time, beginning from the treasury of sacred Scripture. It could also be said of Jerome that, as he himself said of Nepotianus, “by assiduous reading and constant meditation he made his heart a library of Christ”.⁵⁸ Jerome spared no effort in expanding his own library, which he always viewed as an indispensable workshop for understanding the faith and the spiritual life; in this way he serves as a fine example also for the present time. But he did not stop there. For him, study was not limited to the years of his youthful training, but a continual commitment, a daily priority. We can say that he became

⁵⁶ Ibid., 82, 2: CSEL 55, 109.

⁵⁷ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 99: AAS 105 (2013), 1061.

⁵⁸ *Ep.* 60, 10; CSEL 54, 561.

himself a library and a source of knowledge for countless others. Postumianus, who traveled throughout the East in the fourth century in order to explore the growth of monasticism and spent some months with Jerome, saw this with his own eyes. As he wrote: “[Jerome] is always occupied in reading, always at his books: he takes no rest day or night; he is perpetually either reading or writing something”.⁵⁹

In this regard, I often think of the experience a young person can have today entering a bookshop in his or her city, or visiting an Internet site, to look for the section on religious books. In most cases, this section, when it exists, is not only marginal but poorly stocked with works of substance. Looking at those bookshelves or webpages, it is difficult for a young person to understand how the quest of religious truth can be a passionate adventure that unites heart and mind; how the thirst for God has inflamed great minds throughout the centuries up to the present time; how growth in the spiritual life has influenced theologians and philosophers, artists and poets, historians and scientists. One of the problems we face today, not only in religion, is illiteracy: the hermeneutic skills that make us credible interpreters and translators of our own cultural tradition are in short supply. I would like to pose a challenge to young people in particular: begin exploring your heritage. Christianity makes you heirs of an unsurpassed cultural patrimony of which you must take ownership. Be passionate about this history which is yours. Dare to fix your gaze on the young Jerome who, like the merchant in Jesus’ parable, sold all that he had in order to buy the “pearl of great price” (Mt 13:46).

⁵⁹ SULPICIOUS SEVERUS, *Dialogus* I, 9, 5: Sch 510, 136-138.

Jerome can truly be called the “library of Christ”, a perennial library that, sixteen centuries later, continues to teach us the meaning of Christ’s love, a love that is inseparable from an encounter with his word. This is why the present anniversary can be seen as a summons to love what Jerome loved, to rediscover his writings and to let ourselves be touched by his robust spirituality, which can be described in essence as a restless and impassioned desire for a greater knowledge of the God who chose to reveal himself. How can we not heed, in our day, the advice that Jerome unceasingly gave to his contemporaries: “Read the divine Scriptures constantly; never let the sacred volume fall from your hand”?⁶⁰

A radiant example of this is the Virgin Mary, evoked by Jerome above all as Virgin and Mother, but also as a model of prayerful reading of the Scriptures. Mary pondered these things in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19.51) “because she was a holy woman, had read the sacred Scriptures, knew the prophets, and recalled that the angel Gabriel had said to her the same things that the prophets had foretold... She looked at her newborn child, her only son, lying in the manger and crying. What she saw was, in fact, the Son of God; she compared what she saw with all that she had read and heard”.⁶¹ Let us, then, entrust ourselves to Our Lady who, more than anyone, can teach us how to read, meditate, contemplate and pray to God, who tirelessly makes himself present in our lives.

Given in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, on 30 September, the Memorial of Saint Jerome, in the year 2020, the eighth of my Pontificate.

Franciscus

⁶⁰ *Ep.* 52, 7: CSEL 54, 426.

⁶¹ *Homilia de Nativitate Domini* IV: PL Suppl. 2, 191.

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戶名：財團法人天主教會台灣地區主教團

電話：(02) 2732-6602

傳真：(02) 2732-8603

Website：www.catholic.org.tw

Email：bishconf@catholic.org.tw

印刷所：至潔有限公司

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