

Dear Young Friends,

So you are holding something divine in your hands: a book that is like fire! A book through which God speaks. So keep in mind: the Bible is not something to be put on a bookshelf but, rather, to be kept on hand, so you can read from it often, every day, both alone and together.



Pope Francis wrote this foreword in 2016.

If you were to see my Bible, you might not think that it was particularly impressive. “What?! That is the Pope’s Bible! Such an old, worn-out book!” You could give me a new one as a present, one that cost a thousand dollars, but I would not want it. I love my old Bible, which has been with me for half of my life. It witnessed my priestly jubilee and has been sprinkled by my tears. It is my most precious treasure. My life depends on it. I would not give it up for anything in the world.

I like very much the Youth Bible that you have just opened. It is so colorful, so rich in testimonies—the testimonies of saints, the testimonies of young people—and it entices the reader to start reading it from the beginning and not to stop until the last page. And then ...? And then you put it away. It disappears on the bookshelf, back in the third row. It collects dust. Your children sell it someday at the flea market. No, that must not happen!

I want to tell you something: Today there are more persecuted Christians than in the early centuries of the Church. And why are they being persecuted? They are being persecuted because they wear a cross and give witness to Jesus. They are condemned because they own a Bible. The Bible is therefore an extremely dangerous book. So dangerous that in many countries its owners are treated as though they were storing hand grenades in the wardrobe. It was a non-Christian, Mahatma Gandhi, who once said: “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilization topieces, turn the world upside down, and

bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it were nothing more than a piece of literature.”

What, then, are you holding in your hands? A piece of literature? A few nice old stories? Then we would have to say to the many Christians who let themselves be locked up and tortured for the Bible: “How stupid you were; after all, it is only a piece of literature!” No, through the Word of God, light came into the world. And it will never again be extinguished. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (175), I said: “We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for ‘God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us.’ Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.”

So you are holding something divine in your hands: a book that is like fire! A book through which God speaks. So keep in mind: the Bible is not something to be put on a bookshelf but, rather, to be kept on hand, so you can read from it often, every day, both alone and together. After all, you play sports together or go shopping together. Why not read the Bible together, two, three, or four of you at a time? Outdoors in nature, in the woods, on the beach, in the evening, by the light of a few candles.... You will have a powerful experience! Or are you afraid to make fools of yourselves in front of others with such a suggestion?

Read attentively. Do not remain on the surface, as with a comic book. Never just flip through the Word of God! Ask yourselves: “What does it say to my heart? Is God speaking to me through this passage? Is he touching me in the depths of my yearning? What must I do?” Only in that way can the Word of God display its power. Only then can our lives change and become great and beautiful.

I want to tell you how I read in my old Bible! Often I take it out and read a little in it, then I put it away and let the Lord look at me. I do not look at the Lord, but HE looks at me. Indeed, HE is there. I let him gaze at me. And I perceive—this is not just sentimentality—I perceive very deeply the things that the Lord says to me. Sometimes he does not speak. Then I feel nothing, only emptiness, emptiness, emptiness.... But I remain there patiently, and so I wait. I read and pray. I pray seated, because it hurts me to kneel down. Sometimes I even fall asleep while praying. But that makes no difference. I am like a son in his father’s house, and that is the important thing.

Do you want to make me happy? Read the Bible.

Yours truly,

Franciscus