

## The Living of the Word of God by the Students of STL K8

Paul Bui Duy Phat<sup>1\*</sup>, Peter Dao Duc Loc<sup>1</sup>, Francis Xavier Truong Duc Hiep<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Institute of Vietnam

\* Corresponding author's email: phatkhoa6@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the students of the 8th Theology Cohort (STL K8) at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam receive, reflect on, and live out the Word of God. Recognizing Scripture as spiritual nourishment, the students integrate the Word into their daily prayer, study, and mission. The article presents survey findings revealing a deep love and commitment among students to read, meditate on, and proclaim the Word through homilies and community life. Special emphasis is placed on *Lectio Divina* as a method of internalizing Scripture. Moreover, the paper affirms that living the Word is not only academic but a path of witness and missionary discipleship. The students' fidelity to the Word empowers them to share the Gospel effectively in both religious and secular contexts. The study concludes that Scripture shapes their theological formation and strengthens their commitment to evangelization and Christian witness in modern society.

**Keywords:** Word of God, STL K8, *Lectio Divina*, Evangelization, Witness

### TÓM LƯỢC

Bài viết khảo sát cách các sinh viên khóa Thần học STL K8 tại Học viện Công giáo Việt Nam đón nhận, suy niệm và sống Lời Chúa trong đời sống hàng ngày. Nhận thức rằng Lời Chúa là dưỡng chất thiêng liêng, các sinh viên gắn bó với Lời qua cầu nguyện, học tập và sứ vụ. Dữ liệu khảo sát cho thấy tình yêu và sự cam kết sâu sắc trong việc đọc, suy niệm và rao giảng Lời Chúa qua bài giảng và đời sống cộng đoàn. Bài viết đặc biệt nhấn mạnh phương pháp *Lectio Divina* như một cách thức giúp nội tâm hóa Lời Chúa. Đồng thời, sống Lời không chỉ là lý thuyết học thuật mà còn là hành trình chứng nhân và môn đệ truyền giáo. Lòng trung thành với Lời Chúa giúp sinh viên dẫn thân loan báo Tin Mừng trong cả môi trường tôn giáo và xã hội đương đại.

**Từ khoá:** Lời Chúa, STL K8, *Lectio Divina*, Rao giảng Tin Mừng, Chứng nhân

### Introduction

The Word of God is the living word that guides the life of every believer. Psalm 119:105 expresses this well: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." This is also the

firm conviction of St. Peter: "The word of the Lord endures forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:25). The Word of God always has a place and value in the life of the human person, especially those who live the faith in relationship with God. Therefore, we can say that the Word of God is the word that God speaks to all of us. God reveals to us what He wants and makes known His will through the Word and actions. This is also one of the two ways the Church receives revelation from God.

For theology students, the Word of God is always an abundant nourishment so that they can delve deeper and reach the level of true knowledge and wisdom. This article will investigate and present the topic: "The living of the Word of God of the STL K8 students of the Vietnamese Catholic Institute." Furthermore, the article does not aspire to exhaust all the answers, questions, and solutions regarding the living and practice of the Word of God in the life of the Christian in general and the graduate theology students in particular. The article mainly seeks to understand the reality of the reception of the Word of God and the living of the Word of God through the daily life of the STL K8 students, most of whom are priests and religious.

## **The importance of the Word of God for the Christian life**

### *The importance of the Word of God for the Christian life*

Christians are those who have Christ. Those who believe in the Lord always reverently receive the Word of God because they believe it is the Living Word. The Word of God helps them nourish their spiritual life and overcome temptation: "The Lord makes us strong against temptation by using the nourishment of the Word of God to revive us."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Jesus also said to his disciples: "Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him" (Jn 14:21). Therefore, the Scripture has written: "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!" (Ps 96:2-3).

The experiences of the Saints show that, when we diligently meditate on the Word of God, the Lord will guide us with all His wisdom and understanding, leading us into a new horizon where we can find refuge in its freshness and avoid the stifling heat of the world.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the more we study the Sacred Scriptures, the more we extract the hidden virtues within them. The more we grind and ponder the Scriptures in reflection or present commentaries, the more easily they are absorbed.<sup>3</sup>

To better understand the importance of the Word of God in the Christian life, let us examine the perspective of the STL K8 students.

### *The Importance of the Word of God for the STL K8 Students*

The Word of God is very important in the lives of Christians in general, and especially so for the STL K8 students. Therefore, when asked about issues related to reading the Word of God, 100% of the students recognized the natural and supernatural values that the Word of God brings to each person and each community. They unanimously agree that the Word of God is

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<sup>1</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, Nguyên tác: *Lire L'Evangeli selon sant Gregorio le Grand*, tr.60.

<sup>2</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, Nguyên tác: *Lire L'Evangeli selon sant Gregorio le Grand*, tr.62.

<sup>3</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, tr.30.

the nourishing sustenance, the guide, and the support for each person in their unique state of life.

The Word of God is often read aloud during the celebration of the Holy Mass, in the performance of Catholic rituals, in the recitation of prayers, and even in personal reading. This is very evident among the STL K8 students, as when asked: "In a day's living, when and where do you usually read or listen to the Word of God?", the results show that 50% of the students read the Word of God in the chapel, and the other 50% in their private rooms. The majority, around 60%, read in the morning, while the rest read in the evening. These can be considered the most suitable times for the students to immerse themselves in the great treasury of the Word of God.

Reading, understanding, and living the Word of God is something that the Church constantly promotes and seeks. However, the question of how to read and what method to use remains a constant inquiry. It is believed that reading is to understand, and from that, to help the reader live and reflect on the Word of God. When reading, the reader breathes life into the text and makes it more vivid.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the excerpts from the Word of God (*Verbum Dei*) help the individual reader to be imbued with the moral teachings and the call to virtue that come from God. At the same time, with different people and circumstances, the passages of the Word of God have a very specific and individual impact on the soul of each person. This is the depth and vitality of the efficacy of the Word of God, with the power to bathe and renew the soul of the believer.

However, these supernatural effects do not mean that each person understands Sacred Scripture according to their own personal experience and charisms, but rather that they understand and interpret it in communion with the Church. In other words, the interpretation of the Word of God must follow the teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the Church:

"The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but is its servant, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed."<sup>5</sup>

In summary, the Word of God is very important in the lives of the STL K8 students because the Word of God is the source of life, activity, and helps them to reflect in order to deepen their understanding of Sacred Scripture and theology, and about God, so that they may be imbued with the Word of God in their lives. After exploring the importance of the Word of God for the STL K8 students, let us now examine how the K8 students live out the Word of God.

## **The Living of the Word of God of the STL K8 Students**

### *The STL K8 Students Love the Word of God*

To love the Word of God is another way of expressing a love that is convinced by the Word of God. When we love the Lord, we want to meditate on His Word. St. Gregory says:

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<sup>4</sup> Chia sẻ số 49 tháng 3/2006, *Lời Chúa trong cuộc đời* (Tp. HCM: Liên tu sĩ, 2006), tr.33.

<sup>5</sup> Công đồng Vaticanô II, *Dei Verbum*, Bản dịch của ủy ban Giáo lý đức tin, tr. 498 - 499.

"Whoever loves the Word of God is accustomed to frequently encountering the Word of God. He likes to speak to those to whom he writes letters about the joy he feels when he knows they are striving to study the Holy Scriptures."<sup>6</sup>

To love God, to love His Holy Scriptures, and to find joy in that, are all one. "To take delight in the Almighty" (Job 22:26) is to be satisfied with the love of God at the banquet of the Holy Scriptures. And in the Word of God, the more meanings (historical, parabolic, contemplative...) we discover in our progress, the more fascination we encounter.<sup>7</sup> To love the Word of God, is to truly and regularly encounter the Word of God!

In the same thought:

"St. Gregory likes to speak to those to whom he writes letters about the joy he feels when he knows they are striving to study the Holy Scriptures. To love the Holy Scriptures is precisely to imitate the man before original sin; to savor the words of the Lord is to nourish the mind, by loving what we understand. Then the Scriptures will bring us life. To love the Scriptures according to the truth, is to love by action, is to long for the Lord and to practice what we have learned."<sup>8</sup>

This is also the reason why the STL students love and cling to the reading of the Word of God. However, to be able to read with a completely loving mindset is not an easy task. It will be an ideal, a dream that everyone needs to strive for. This is also very real for the STL K8 students, 70% do so out of love, while 30% are still implementing it with the mindset of those who are longing to seek, often reading only as a habit.

From the above surveys, we realize that the practice of pious works and the increase of spiritual life among the STL K8 students are very specific and practical. They are aware of the importance of the Word of God for their life and mission. They love the Word of God, have the intention to learn, listen, and practice the Word of God. And the STL K8 students have also realized that: The Word of God has nourished their life, guided and supported them in the different circumstances of life. The Word of God they have received has given them wisdom and intelligence to be instructed in new theological issues. The Word of God has acted to nourish their faith and hope to overcome the challenges and difficulties arising from difficult subjects like Greek, Hebrew, etc.

Indeed, "it is precisely by reading the Sacred Scriptures that we gradually come to understand the Sacred Scriptures, and that discovery never ends. The entire Bible has been written for us, but we can never fully comprehend it all."<sup>9</sup> Reading and meditating is the way to receive the Word of God at the center, reading so that the Word of God permeates their soul. Reading the Word of God according to the method of *Lectio Divina* is a way of reading that the Church promotes because it easily helps the faithful delve deeper into the Word of God, pray with the Word of God, and put the Word of God into practice by living a life of witness. This is also the way that 60% of the STL K8 students use when reading the Word of God, not reading passively but seeking to apply it to the real life of each person, in various specific circumstances.

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<sup>6</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, Nguyên tác: *Lire L'Evangelii selon sant Gregorio le Grand*, tr. 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, tr.60.

<sup>8</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, tr.72.

<sup>9</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcá*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, Nguyên tác: *Lire L'Evangelii selon sant Gregorio le Grand*, tr.25.

Indeed, there are many ways to read the Word of God. Those who love the Lord often read the Sacred Scriptures in silence, secretly and without sound: "They will open their mouths like the poor eating in secret" (Hab 3:14). The Word of God is the way of God entering into our hearts, in a reciprocal way, the Sacred Scriptures are also the way for us to go to God. "Seek to understand the heart of God in the Word of God" (Eph 4:31).<sup>10</sup> Here, the Word of God is the letter God sends to us to live by, to make known to us the heart of God. Reading the Word of God is a task that the doctor of an emperor is invited to do every day. It is a natural thing in the life of a Christian<sup>11</sup>.

If we know the Sacred Scriptures correctly, it is the door that leads us to the knowledge of invisible things. "The knowledge of God is a mountain that cannot be expressed. We understand God through the Sacred Scriptures, and so the Sacred Scriptures are like the steps we climb to reach that high peak."<sup>12</sup> When we read the Word of God, we pluck the green leaves of the word; when we reflect, we grind and chew the Word, we pluck the ripe fruits of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, the reading and meditation of the Word of God is always necessary because it strengthens the life of the faithful. The STL K8 students have placed the Word of God in a worthy position and level in their lives. They love the Word of God, are diligent in prayer and reflection. They feel the love through the Word of God to love God. That is why they feel God's love and are ready to commit, to bear witness to the Gospel of God.

#### *The STL K8 students live and practice the Word of God*

Listening to, reflecting on, and practicing the Word of God helps the theology students to grow and reach higher in a world where God is the sovereign over all realms and activities. Hearing the Word of God is easy but hearing it with conviction and putting it into practice is indeed a challenging process.

When the STL K8 students were asked: In your opinion, what is the best way to live and effectively practice the Word of God? The responses of the students show that living and bringing the Word of God into practice is also very rich, but with a real challenge. Some use the method of sharing the Word of God in groups so that the Word may resonate with everyone. Some students write down verses of the Word of God to have them visible, so that the Word accompanies them throughout the day. Most of the priests meditate on the Word of God and apply it to their daily homilies. With the spiritual experience that the Word of God has on the life of each priest, it is believed that their homilies will be not just the words of the books, but the language of a witness. Therefore, when reading the Word of God daily, many students extract a theme verse for the passage and also apply it as the theme for the whole day, from dawn to dusk.

Everyone clearly feels and has a personal experience of reading and practicing the Word of God. Whoever is diligent in learning, reflecting, and bringing the Word of God into practice, that person easily nourishes the love of Christ, and this love will help us overcome all difficulties as Saint Paul experienced so profoundly: "In the same way, let us love Christ, seek to be united with him, and we will find that what was difficult becomes easy." (Eph 2:22, 40)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcô*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, tr.20.

<sup>11</sup> *Độc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcô*, tr.21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, tr.22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, tr.29.

<sup>14</sup> Nhóm Các Giờ Kinh Phụng Vụ, *Huấn quyền và Lời Chúa* (TP.HCM: Đà Nẵng, 2023), 316.

Practicing the Word of God also means applying the teachings of God in the Gospel concretely in one's own life. For example, if the Lord teaches about forgiveness, it helps us in life to have less anger, hatred, and to practice forgiveness towards our brothers and sisters. The process of practicing the Word of God starts from what we have meditated on through reading the Word of God, prayer, and reflection. This process helps us to have a firm conviction about the right truth and the things that God stirs up in our minds to want us to put into practice.

However, one must remember that the fundamental factor is that to practice the Word of God according to God's will, we must pray and contemplate. Therefore, before taking action, we must pray. Action is to do according to God's will, while prayer is to discern God's will and carry it out correctly.

### *STL K8 Students Proclaim the Word of God*

Proclaiming the Word of God is a sacred mission. Those who receive the Word of God freely must also freely share it with others. The Word of God needs to be proclaimed because the need to hear and receive the Word of God is a universal human need. This is because God desires for all people to know and love Him. Furthermore, the one who proclaims the Word of God is the one who speaks the words of the Lord, so that the Word of God may bear fruit in the hearts of those who receive it. In this way, the proclamation of the Word of God is a work that brings spiritual value and pleases the Lord.

Particularly among the STL K8 students, nearly 50% are Priests. The Priest's proclamation of the Word of God is a mission tied to the ministerial priesthood. Thus, the Priest is not only a witness, but also an apostle and evangelizer.<sup>15</sup> "By the preaching of the Gospel of salvation, the whole world is called through hearing to believe and believe to hope and hope to love" (DV 1). Therefore, studying, reflecting on, and living the Word of God is always necessary to help the faithful live out their faith. This is because the Word of God leads people to encounter and abide in God, who is truth and life (Jn 8:31-32). "To discover and recognize the face of God, it is essential to remain faithful and deeply rooted in the Word of God."<sup>16</sup>

At this point, may I be permitted to reiterate once more, the weightiest proclamation is the proclamation through the witness of life and interior life. Certainly, with the proclamation of those who have the Lord within, through a life of virtue, they will attract, convince, and draw people to the Lord who is truth and reality.

## **The results of the students of the STL K8 program living, preaching, and practicing the Word of God**

### *Going forth to proclaim the Gospel*

The call to go forth and proclaim the Gospel is always an urgent imperative from Jesus Christ: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). This is also the missionary mandate, the mission of the Church. As such, it is often said: The very nature of the Church is missionary. Missionary work or proclaiming the Gospel are different ways of expressing the task of bringing the joyful news of the Resurrection to all places.

Going forth to proclaim the Gospel is also the invitation given by the celebrant at the conclusion of the holy Mass. The call to go and proclaim the Gospel means bringing the Good News of the Lord into various life contexts, through preaching and bearing witness to the

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Giáo luật*, số 757; 762; 767.

<sup>16</sup> Bộ giáo sĩ, *Kim Chỉ Nam về tác vụ và đời sống Linh Mục* (Hà Nội: Tôn Giáo, 2013), số 62, 100.

Gospel of the Resurrection. Therefore, when asked: How does the Word of God impact the proclamation of the Gospel? All the students recognize that the Word of God is the primary agent that empowers each person to proclaim the Gospel. Most feel that the Word of God enriches their proclamation of the Gospel (70%), while the remainder say that the Word of God guides their proclamation of the Gospel (30%).

In addition, the STL K8 students are always aware of the responsibility of the mission to proclaim the Gospel through the very lives of each person. The proclamation of the Gospel is not limited to priests, deacons, seminarians, or religious, but is an invitation for all people, whether they live in the married and family life or any other state of life. The students are very aware that this responsibility is always accompanied by no simple challenges, both in their own educational environment and in the rapidly changing world today. Next, we come to the aspect of the life of witness in the proclamation of the Gospel.

### *The Witness of Life of the STL K8 Students*

Witness or testimony is the unity between perception and life. Once we have received the Word of God and are convinced of the truthfulness and veracity of the Word, we can easily apply the Word of God to our lives. Indeed, "A single voice encompasses all the attitudes of the reader towards Sacred Scripture: Love, the power of charity. God has said everything to us through Scripture, with the unique purpose of drawing us to the love of God and love of neighbor."<sup>17</sup>

In truth, the understanding of the Word of God and living a life of witness also demands something else, which is to "Attract others to the life" [of Christ]. We must understand the Word of God in a way that is beneficial to us and must convey it to others with a sacred intention, persuading them through our way of life. This is why Scripture says: "Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the people of Israel" (Ez 3:1). Thus, the one who speaks about the Word of God must first examine how he or she is living. "Indeed, to teach, the awareness of God's love influences others more than skillful words."<sup>18</sup>

Pope Paul VI said: "Today, people need witnesses more than teachers, and if they believe the teacher, it is because the teacher is a witness." We trust and hope that with the zeal to live as witnesses to the Word of God, the STL K8 students will bring a distinctive character to the witness of the Gospel at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam.

The Second Vatican Council earnestly and especially exhorts all the faithful of Christ, especially the members of religious communities, to frequently read the Sacred Scriptures in order to learn "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:8), for not to know the Scriptures is not to know Christ. Furthermore, knowing Christ requires living as a witness to what one has believed and known. More than anyone else, the STL K8 students always carry within them the flame of love and charity, that is, love of God and love of neighbor, which will help them perceive the presence of God in their lives, guiding and nourishing them to seek truth and knowledge. In this way, they will feel that they are children of God and that God is the Lord of their lives.

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<sup>17</sup> *Đọc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcả*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, Nguyên tác: *Lire L'Evangeli selon sant Gregorio le Grand*, tr.66.

<sup>18</sup> *Đọc Kinh thánh theo thánh Grêgôriôcả*, Nữ Biển Đức chuyển ngữ, tr.56.

The life of the Word of God of the STL K8 students, although already being lived out daily, the vocation and mission they have received and are still receiving need to be expressed even more in their love for God and His eternal Word.

## Conclusion

In summary, studying and meditating on the Word of God is always necessary for every believer, as the Word of God helps nourish and guide the spiritual life of the believer. The Word of God will truly be beneficial for those who know how to listen and put the Word of God into practice. Therefore, the students of the 8th Theology Cohort are aware that their mission is to be nourished by the Word of God so that they may have the strength and zeal to go forth and proclaim the Gospel and live as witnesses to the Good News. Through this article, we wish to reflect on the students of the School of Theology's own reading and living of the Word of God, to see if the Word of God is truly important and the top priority for them. And we can affirm that, indeed, the Word of God is nourishing and urging them to have the determination to live according to what the Word of God teaches and to commit themselves to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. We hope this article will be like adding fuel to the fire of love for the Word in each person, especially the students of the 8th Theology Cohort. May the grace of God act to make the soil of each person's heart open and receptive so that the seed, which is the Word of God, may be sown and bear fruit according to God's holy will.

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