

## 11. Father Francis Jordan, anchored in the Holy Scripture

by Fr. Michael Overmann SDS, Munich, 1 March 2021

We know about St. Francis of Assisi that he could not read and study the Scriptures himself and had to rely on the help of priests who told him the passages and interpreted them. The legend of the three companions tells us that he and his first companions went to the church of St. Niccolò in the marketplace of Assisi to ‘poke the Bible’ to find out what answer God would give them to the question of their life programme. Francis, after opening the Scriptures for the third time, was sure: “Brothers, this is the life, this is the rule for us.” [Mt 19:21 / Lk 9:3 / Lk 9:23]

It was a little different for John-Baptist Jordan: after graduating from high school, he matriculated as a student of philosophy and theology at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau on 23 October 1874. Edwein says: “Jordan’s personal life gained a noticeable deepening with the theological studies.” (DSS XIV, I/45) At the same time he took philological subjects, which on the one hand enabled him to study the Bible in the original languages and at the same time opened up the perspectives of world mission. The months Jordan spent in the St. Peter’s seminary before his ordination were marked by, contemplation of the Holy Scriptures and intensive spiritual reading.

Fr. Francis of the Cross Jordan:

“Always read Holy Scripture with great reverence and kneeling, at least when you are alone.”

(SD I/68)

“Put great effort into meditating, learning, and contemplating Sacred Scripture, using a good commentary...”

(SD I/39)

“If your confessor permits you, meditate often (i.e. daily) on the Sacred Scriptures!”

(SD I/140)

Due to the laws during the battle between the German state and the Church, he could not be employed in pastoral work after his ordination as a priest on 21 July and his first Mass on 25 July 1878 in Döttingen in Switzerland. The new priest was considered outlawed by this and was sent to Rome by Auxiliary Bishop von Kübel for further language studies.

In the second year of these studies, he travelled to Cairo and Jerusalem on 21 October 1880 on behalf of the Propaganda Congregation and finally to Ain Warka in Lebanon to study Arabic. He confided the spiritual highlights of his

stay in Jerusalem and on Mount Carmel to his Spiritual Diary (SD I/152\*-156\*). In Lebanon, a passage from the Gospel of John became the foundation and inspiration for his future work: “*This is life eternal, that they may know you, the only true God, and whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.*” (John 17:3)

“Read Sacred Scripture often; even better, never let the sacred reading leave your hand... Let sleep find you holding the Bible, and the sacred page supporting your nodding head. (St. Jerome)”

(SD I/145)

Once again, we are reminded of Francis of Assisi, who prayed in front of the image of the cross in San Damiano: “... Give me, Lord, the [right] feeling and knowledge, so that I may fulfil your holy and true mission.” Like his patron saint, Francis Jordan henceforth wanted to live entirely from the knowledge of God, that is, to understand and proclaim God’s Word, and like him, he put together scriptural words to outline his vocation and the spirit of his work. (SD I/157\*-159\*)

Later on, other biblical texts urged him:

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16)

SD I/212

“Preach the gospel to all creatures! (Mc 16,15)

SD II/32

### Suggestions for further reflection:

1. Scripture and vocation: Which scriptural word resonates with me and motivates me to this day?
2. Scripture and religious life: Are there biblical challenges that shape my daily religious life?
3. Scripture and mission: How can we help other people to live from and with the Scriptures?