INTRODUCTION:

In a time when everyone has an opinion about everything and truth seems fragmented into a thousand voices, the Christian faces a crucial question: **Am I truly listening to God when I read the Bible, or am I only listening to myself?**
Reading Sacred Scripture is not a neutral act. Our upbringing, wounds, passions, and even our ideologies can filter what we think we understand. This is where two fundamental terms for any serious believer come in: **exegesis** and **eisegesis**.

This article is not just a theological lesson but a **living spiritual guide** to help you approach the Word of God with reverence, intelligence, and an open heart. Because **misreading the Bible not only confuses us, but can also distort the very face of Christ**.

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1. What Do “Exegesis” and “Eisegesis” Mean?

Both words have Greek roots and refer to ways of interpreting a text, especially the Bible:

- **Exegesis (ἐξήγησις)** literally means “to draw out.” It consists of **extracting the meaning from the text itself**, respecting its historical, cultural, literary, and theological context. It is the path of the humble disciple who listens.
- **Eisegesis (εἰσήγησις)** means “to lead into.” This is when the reader **projects their own ideas, emotions, or interests onto the text**, twisting its original meaning. It is the path of the reader who seeks not to be taught, but to be affirmed.

In simple words: **Exegesis seeks what God says; eisegesis seeks what I want it to say**.

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2. A Bit of History: How Did the Church Interpret the Bible?

From the beginning, the Church understood that Scripture must be read **within the living Tradition and in communion with the faith of the Church**. Here are some key moments:

- **Church Fathers** (2nd–5th centuries): Figures like St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and Origen

developed profoundly spiritual readings, but always within ecclesial faith. For them, Scripture had multiple senses (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), but never arbitrary ones.

- **Middle Ages**: Great theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas deepened the harmony between reason and faith. **Scholastic exegesis** became a theological art and spiritual path.
- **Council of Trent (16th century)**: In response to Protestant free interpretation, the Church reaffirmed that the Bible must be read **under the guidance of the Magisterium**, to avoid error and division.
- **Second Vatican Council (20th century)**: In *Dei Verbum*, it insists that Sacred Scripture must be read with three key criteria:
  1. **The unity of the whole of Scripture**.
  2. **The living Tradition of the Church**.
  3. **The analogy of faith**.

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3. Why Is It So Important Today to Distinguish Between Exegesis and Eisegesis?

We live in the age of the "self": **I interpret**, **I believe**, **I feel God is telling me…**. Without realizing it, **we turn the Bible into a mirror instead of a window**. But if we project our ideas onto the text, we run a grave risk: **making a god in our own image and likeness**.

As St. Paul warns:

> *"**For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions**" (2 Timothy 4:3).*

Many today use the Bible to **justify ideologies, validate sin, or even deny revealed truths**. This is eisegesis in its most dangerous form: using the Word of God against God Himself.

4. How to Do Exegesis: A Practical, Theological, and Pastoral Guide

Here is a **step-by-step guide** to reading the Bible as a true disciple—with humility, intelligence, and love.

Step 1: Prayer and Heart Disposition

Before opening the Bible, **pray**. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and prepare your heart.

> *"Lord, may I not seek what I want to hear, but what You want to say."*

Step 2: Read the Text in Its Context

Don't pull out isolated phrases. **Read what comes before and after**, and try to understand:

- Who is being addressed?
- What is the historical situation?
- What type of text is it (poetry, law, gospel, prophecy, parable)?
  This is called the **literal sense**, and it's the foundation of all interpretation.

Step 3: Study with Good Resources

Don't interpret on your own. Use:

- Bibles with notes approved by the Church.
- Commentaries from saints, Church Fathers, and theologians faithful to the Magisterium.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Step 4: Read Within Tradition

Ask yourself: How has the Church understood this passage over the centuries?
Avoid "novel" interpretations that contradict what has always been believed.

Step 5: Apply to Your Life (Without Twisting the Text)

Once the meaning is understood, now yes—**live it out**. Ask yourself:

- What does this teach me about God?
- What does it reveal about myself?
- What do I need to change, correct, or be thankful for?

Do not adapt the Bible to your life. Adapt your life to the Bible.

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5. What If I've Already Fallen into Eisegesis Without Knowing?

Don't condemn yourself. We all do it at some point. The good news is that we can correct our course. The humility to say, "I was wrong," is already an act of exegesis, because you are now willing to let the Word teach you.

Review your readings. Ask yourself:

- Am I forcing this text to say what I want?
- Am I avoiding what makes me uncomfortable?
- Am I reading to encounter God, or just to prove myself right?

If you answer honestly, you're on the right path.

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6. Keys to Avoid Modern Eisegesis

- **Do not use the Bible as an ideological weapon.**
- **Do not ignore difficult passages.**
- **Do not quote out of context to justify yourself.**

- **Do not replace the Church with Google.**
- **Do not place your experience above the text.**

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7. A Concrete Example: “Do not judge” (Mt 7:1)

How many times have we heard this verse used to **justify moral relativism**? But if we read the full context, Jesus is not saying not to judge evil, but not to be **hypocritical** or to condemn without mercy.

Exegesis: “Do not judge rashly; use discernment with charity.”

Eisegesis: “No one can tell me something is wrong.”

A single misinterpreted phrase can lead an entire culture to justify sin. That’s how important proper interpretation is.

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8. Pastoral Application: How to Teach This in Family, Groups, or Parish?

- **Regular biblical formation** with faithful Catholic guides.
- **Prayer spaces with the Word** (Lectio Divina).
- **Workshops on biblical interpretation** accessible to all.
- **Avoid improvisation or excessive subjectivity in homilies or catechesis.**
- **Encourage personal reading supported by solid commentaries.**

The Bible must be **read, prayed, studied, and lived**, not improvised or manipulated.

CONCLUSION: Let God Speak

Returning to exegesis is to **return to the Word as a living Word, not an echo of our ideas**. It’s letting God be God, and us be disciples.

The Bible does not need to be reinterpreted to fit the world. The world needs to be transformed by the eternal Word of God.

Let me close with this verse from the Psalms:

> *"**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path**" (Psalm 119:105).*

Don't be the one to extinguish that lamp with your own shadows.
Let the Bible read you before you read it.