

Prayerful Bible Reflection

-Fr Mario Mendes

1. **Retire:** Keep everything else aside; this is sacred time with the Word of God! Begin by putting yourself in a prayerful disposition by becoming aware of your breathing, or with a soft hymn, etc.
2. **Read:** Slowly and prayerfully read the passage – may be one chapter, or an episode, parable, etc. [it must be a logically complete unit]. Read it 2-3 times. As you read observe the following:
 - a. What is the situation?
 - b. Who all are involved?
 - c. What are the feelings of those involved?
 - d. Who says what and to whom? Or, who does what and to whom?
 - e. How does this affect the situation? What is the final outcome?You may write a brief summary (3 - 4 lines) of the passage in your notebook.

3. **Reflect:** What is God teaching me through this passage? Does this passage shed light on any situation in my life?
You may mark your reflections / insights by underscoring, circling, coloring or highlighting important words / verses. A color scheme may be used for emphasizing some important subjects as suggested below:

Red:	A revealed truth concerning God. e.g., “The Lord saved Israel” Ex14:30; or “Nothing can separate us from the love of God” (Rom 8:38)
Light Blue:	Referring to prayers [imagine prayers going up into the light blue sky] e.g., “Father, if you are willing take this cup away. Yet not my will but your will be done” Lk 22:42.
Dark Blue:	For healing of Hurts / forgiveness [think of the dark Blue wounds] e.g., “The Lord forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases...” Ps 103:3.
Light Green:	Coming of God’s kingdom and future Hope [Greenery is a sign of hope and new life] e.g., “The kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” Rom 14:17.
Brown:	A human experience, or an insight into human nature. E.g., “In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord” (Ex 14:10)
Yellow / Gold:	Indicating the Law / Commands of God [because they are golden rules for life] e.g., “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself.” Lk 10:27); or “Never grow tired of doing what is good” (Eph 6:9)

(You may **develop your own color code** as a memory aid)

If you have any doubts or questions that arise, just note them down in your notebook and continue with your reflections. You can clarify them later by referring to a Bible Commentary, or check it with your professors / Spiritual director, etc.

4. **Respond:** What concrete action do I need to take in response to God’s word? (Be very specific; this is your personal diary and no one else is going to see it)

Let us take, for example, the Scripture passage of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14:10-31).

Read the passage & then write a brief summary in your notebook:

E.g., – The Israelites were trapped between the sea and the Pharaoh's army chasing them. In fear they grumbled against Moses that it would have been better not to leave Egypt. But Moses stood firm in faith that the Lord will deliver them. And indeed the Lord delivered them; the Israelites saw the mighty work of the Lord and believed in God and Moses.

Reflect on this passage:

E.g., how I have lost faith in the face of troubles...just like the Israelites. Encircle 'looked back' and 'cried out' (Ex 14:10) in Brown because it reflects our human tendency.

Through Moses, God makes a promise that gives me hope in my despair. Mark it in green - "Do not be afraid, stand firm and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today...the Lord will fight for you" (Ex14: 13-14).

'Go Forward' (Ex14: 15) is a golden rule for life; mark it in Yellow.

I learn a great truth about God – He Saves his people! Mark in Red "The Lord Saved Israel" (Ex14: 30).

I realize that I am so much like the Israelites who "Saw the great work that the Lord did... and believed" (Ex14: 31). Encircle 'Saw' and 'Believed' in Brown color as a reminder of my human weakness of wanting to see before I believe; but how conveniently I forget all that the Lord has done for me in the past.

Respond to God's Word:

*e.g., (a reflection given by a college student) I often find myself looking back on my life and crying over it, and blaming my parents for my poor self image. Yesterday I refused to participate in the class debate, as I am a very nervous person. Today I hear the Lord saying, "Go forward". **I accept the offer to volunteer for the next class debate even though I am nervous.** I believe that the Lord will deliver me!*

Doubts / Questions:

Why did God harden the heart of Pharaoh?

Why does God want Glory for himself? Is he not proud in seeking his own glory?

Ex 14:10-31

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' ¹³But Moses said to the people, '**Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today;** for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.'

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to **go forward**. ¹⁶But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.'

19 The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.'

26 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30 Thus **the LORD saved Israel** that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.