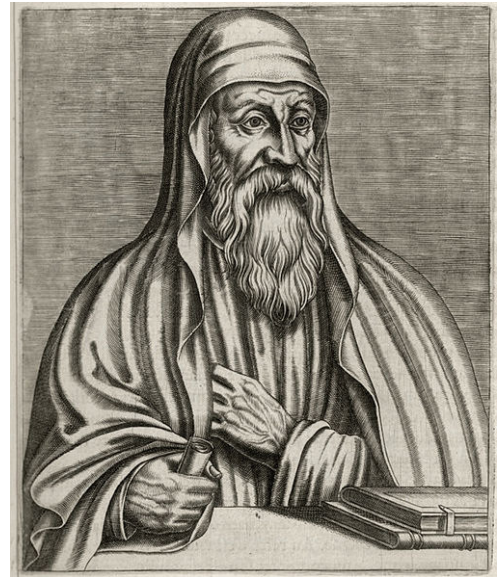


## Prayer of the Month • April 2012

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen, c. 185–c. 254



The Bible seems to many to be a book that stands on its own. It has been treated like an encyclopaedia or a text book. It is easy to find in it theories that we wish to agree with or disagree with. However, the Bible is a very special book, not because it is directly the word of God (otherwise we would all be linguists, familiar with Hebrew and Greek) or because it is literally true, whatever that may mean, but because it is inspired by God. It is inspired in the writing, and it needs to be inspired in the reading as well if it is to be understood correctly. This is what Origen recognises as he approaches the Bible. We can sense his earnest desire to understand the Bible properly, as befits a biblical scholar, which is what he is in essence. Our own understanding is limited, we are predisposed to mistake, misunderstand, and corrupt what we find there. Even our good intentions are insufficient. We need something from beyond ourselves, something that comes from God, to act like a key in the lock. This is grace, the unmerited gift and goodness of God that shines into the darkness of our hearts and illuminates all it falls on. God's grace can bring to life the dead text we see with our eyes, and convey that life into our hearts.

Origen has never made it to the status of 'saint' in the Church. He had a fertile imagination, and wrote about many things. It is not surprising that he was an original thinker, coming as he does near the beginning of the Christian centuries. He was born towards the end of the second century, a biblical critic, exegete, theologian and spiritual writer from Alexandria. He was brought up in a Christian family, and his father was killed in a wave of persecution in 202. Origen was prevented from seeking his own martyrdom by a ploy of his mother, who hid his clothes. Later, when peace was restored, Origen taught in Alexandria at the Catechetical School. He lived a strict life of fasting, vigils, and voluntary poverty. He made several long journeys, including to Rome and to Palestine where he was asked to preach by the bishops of Caesaria and Aelia. As he was only a layman at the time, he had transgressed church protocols and his diocesan bishop, Demetrius, called him back to Alexandria. Later, he went back to Palestine, where he was ordained by the same bishops. However, Demetrius sacked him from his post and deposed him as priest. Origen moved to Caesaria where he established a school which became famous. He continued writing and preaching, Many of his writings have been lost, and those that survive are generally fragments or Latin translations. The most important of his works to come down to us is his 'De Principiis', which covers a wide range of doctrinal topics, including the doctrine of God and heavenly beings, man and the material world, free will and its consequences, and Holy Scripture. In 250, in the persecutions of Decius, he was imprisoned and subjected to prolonged torture. He only survived this treatment for a few years, dying around 254.

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