



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

SACRED SCRIPTURE, APOSTOLIC TRADITION & THE MAGISTERIUM

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
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God's Revelation to Mankind

- ❖ The Church defines *divine revelation* as God's communication of Himself to mankind “through Christ, the Word made flesh.” Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 2
- ❖ Prior to divine revelation, God made Himself known to man through the gift of reason and the observation of the natural world.
- ❖ “For what can be known about God is plain to them,” writes Saint Paul, “because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” Romans 1:19-20

Christ: the fullness of Divine Revelation

- ❖ Our salvation was contained within God’s plan from the beginning—in His manifestation to Adam and Eve before the Fall, and afterwards in His promise to send a Savior—“the seed” of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head. Cf. Gen. 3:15
- ❖ This promise was progressively revealed throughout salvation history, through the patriarchs and prophets, and finally in the coming of Christ Jesus, who “perfected revelation by fulfilling it through His whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself; through His words and deeds.” *Dei Verbum* 4

The Necessity of Divine Revelation

- ❖ While we may come to know God partly through reason and observation of the natural world, we cannot fully know Him in this way.
- ❖ This is because our intellect has been darkened by the Fall.
- ❖ It was necessary, therefore, for God to come to reveal Himself to us.
- ❖ So it is that what can be known of Him through reason is clarified with certainty through revealed doctrine so that it “can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race.” *Dei Verbum* 6

Twin Channels of the One Deposit of Faith

- ❖ The Church has always taught that divine revelation, the one deposit of faith entrusted to the Apostles, is transmitted through both Apostolic Tradition and Sacred Scripture together.
- ❖ Paul, for instance, spoke of the need for Christians to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” 2 Thess. 2:15
- ❖ The Council of Trent likewise taught: “This truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and in the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand.” *Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*

The Relationship Between Scripture & Tradition

- ❖ The Second Vatican Council reflected more deeply on this truth, more fully revealing the interconnectedness of Scripture and Tradition.
- ❖ Christ, having enlightened the Apostles by His words and deeds, commissioned them “to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching.” *Dei Verbum* 7
- ❖ There was a certain progression by which the Apostles carried out this commission: first, “by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances;” then, by their writing. *Ibid.*

The Word of God Written and Spoken

- ❖ So perfectly connected are Scripture and Tradition, in fact, that they are essentially one tradition: “the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books.” *Dei Verbum* 8
- ❖ As Vatican II explained, Scripture and Tradition are not two isolated sources of divine revelation. Rather, “flowing from the same divine wellspring, [they] in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.” *Dei Verbum* 9
- ❖ Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God in writing; and Apostolic Tradition is the word of God handed on under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the preaching and practice of the Apostles.

Interpreting Divine Revelation

- ❖ The interpretation of the Gospel has been entrusted, not to the individual, but to the community of the faithful, and specifically to the Magisterium or “teaching office” of the Church.
- ❖ By Magisterium, we are speaking of the Pope and bishops in union with him, the divinely appointed teachers of the faithful.
- ❖ That our interpretation of God’s revelation comes to us primarily through the Magisterium does not mean the Magisterium is superior to the word of God.
- ❖ The Magisterium, says Vatican II, “is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a 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 divine revealed.” *Dei Verbum* 10

Personal Interpretation vs. the Magisterium

- ❖ While Catholics pray to the Holy Spirit for assistance in understanding Scripture, we acknowledge that our personal interpretation must correspond to the teaching of the Church's Magisterium.
- ❖ For it is primarily through the Magisterium that the Spirit speaks. Cf. *Dei Verbum* 10
- ❖ We are called not to rely on our own understanding, but in humility to assent to the understanding entrusted by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the Church.
- ❖ For “the church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of the truth.” 1 Tim. 3:15

The Dangers of Private Interpretation

- ❖ Protestantism on the other hand is founded on the idea that the Bible is meant to be interpreted by the individual and not by the Church.
- ❖ Yet this approach has led, from the time of Martin Luther, to ongoing division and the creation of thousands of competing denominations who disagree on the meaning of Scripture.
- ❖ It is our reliance on the Magisterium, instead of our own private interpretation, that prevents Catholicism from splintering in this way.
- ❖ “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Pet. 1:20-21



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