

13. Sacred Scripture & Sacred Tradition

Throughout all of Sacred Scripture, God the Father speaks only one single Word of love: Jesus.

Key terms:

Sacred Scripture:	The collection of holy and inspired writings officially and solemnly recognized in the Christian canon. The revelation of God put down in writing by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
Biblical Canon:	A set of scriptural texts (books) which God has given to his people. These books were grouped together by God's people relatively early, with the OT being settled and stable by the birth of Jesus at latest, and the NT gaining large agreement even before the end of the second century.
Sacred Tradition:	The living transmission of the entirety of revelation by the successors of the apostles under the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit.
Revelation:	God telling us about himself and his will for us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition; Jesus Christ is the fullness of all revelation.
Deposit of Faith:	The entirety of revelation, contained in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
Magisterium:	The teaching office of the Church, consisting of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him, that through the power of the Holy Spirit guards and communicates the deposit of Faith.

SACRED SCRIPTURE

- 'Sacred Scripture is inspired by God and truly contains the Word of God. This action of God is referred to as Inspiration.
- God is the author of Sacred Scripture, inspiring the human authors, acting in and through them. Thus God ensured that the authors taught divine and saving truth without error.
- Scripture is a record of God's love – a revelation of God's steadfast guidance, great mercy, and complete fidelity. It speaks of his relationship with his creatures, his love and desire for us to respond to his love (Hos. 3:19-20).
- The Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The unity of the Old and New Testaments flows from the revealed unity of God's loving plan to save us.
- Our response to God's revelation is faith, by which we surrender our whole selves to him.' God the Father wants all to be saved and come to know him (1Tim 2:4).

INTERPRETING SACRED SCRIPTURE

- Scripture must be read as a unity and every part of Scripture within the context of the whole.
- Scripture must be read with the eyes and understanding of faith.
- It is possible to misunderstand the truths of Scripture through private revelation.
- The Church's living Tradition makes true and unerring understanding of Scripture possible.
- It is possible to misunderstand the truths of Scripture through private interpretation.

SACRED SCRIPTURE IS THE AUTHENTIC WORD OF GOD (Heb. 4:11-12)

- God himself is the Author of Scripture.
 - Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, human authors used their own words, conditioned by their own times, culture and modes of writing.
 - They wrote only and exactly what God wanted written.
- Scripture teaches, without error, the truths needed for salvation. Sacred Scripture is food and instruction for every aspect of our lives as Christians. (2 Tim 3:16)
- The Sacred Tradition of the Church has determined which books are authentic revelations from the Holy Spirit.
- Sacred Scripture is the living and active Word of God; imparting grace to its hearers (Is. 55:10-11)

SACRED TRADITION

- 'The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. This is what is meant by the term Tradition.
- The teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium – that is, the pope and the bishops in communion with him – has the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, contained in Sacred Scripture and transmitted by Sacred Tradition.'
- 'Scripture and Tradition are central to the life of the Church and to catechesis. The apostles entrusted to the whole Church the message of salvation, the 'sacred deposit' of faith which is contained in Scripture and Tradition.'

HOW JESUS MADE THE FATHER'S PLAN EFFECTIVE

- He redeemed us and restored us to the Father's favour through his Paschal Mystery.
- He established his Church with the power to bind and loose (Mt. 16:18-19 and Mt. 18:18).
- He gave his apostles his own teaching authority (Lk. 10:16).
- He commanded his apostles to baptise and preach.
- He promised his apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and enabled them to remember everything he had taught them (Jn. 14:26).

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN GUIDING AND GUARDING THE CHURCH'S TEACHING IN EVERY AGE (Jn. 16:12-15)

- Through the apostles and their successors, Sacred Tradition preserves the fullness of revelation, both orally and in writing, unchanging for all generations. (1Thess 2:15; Heb. 13:7-9)
- Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are intimately connected, with Sacred Tradition predating and producing the New Testament, which sprang from the living Tradition of the Church.
- The Church derives her certainty about all revealed truth from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which are both guided by the Holy Spirit. Through the authority to bind and loose, the Church proclaims dogmas which are to be held as the authentic teaching of Christ. (Gal.1:6-2).

EXPLORE!

Explore with candidates how to navigate the Bible. The appendix may assist in this regard. Why was adhering to Tradition so important to St. Paul?

(Paul's letters were written 10-15 years before even the first Gospel was written (Gospel of Mark from c. AD 66–70, Matthew and Luke around AD 85–90, and John AD 90–110). So St. Paul was passing on the teachings of Christ in oral form, and then writing letters back to these churches to remind them of what he instructed.)

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why is the Bible the story of salvation? How are the two testaments related to one another?
2. How is God the author of Sacred Scripture?
3. Why can't we pick and choose what pleases us in the Bible and ignore the rest?
4. What does the statement: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus Christ?" mean?
5. Why should reading and studying the Bible always be rooted in prayer and meditation?
6. Did the apostles intend for there to be Sacred Tradition or was Sacred Tradition something invented by the Church?
7. Why is the New Testament better understood in light of the Old Testament?
8. Why isn't my interpretation of Sacred Scripture just as good as the next person's?
9. Which comes first: Tradition, Magisterium, or the Bible?
10. How are Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition related to one another?

PRAAYER

Pray Isaiah 12 or Psalm 111
or

Gospel Reflection: Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year A Jn. 1:29-34
Year B Jn. 1:35-42
Year C Jn. 2:1-11

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Introduction to Scripture and Tradition

Scripture

Sir 24:30-34	God will provide an abundant outpouring of his teaching for all future generations.
Dt. 7:18-20	The future king of the Israelites must write for himself a copy of the law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) so that he might read it every day.
Neh. 8:1-18	Ezra reads the law of Moses to the Israelites, who stand while it is being read.
Jer. 30:1-12, 36:1-2	God commands Jeremiah to write all the words he has spoken to the prophet.
Lk. 10:16	Those who hear the apostles, hear Christ, and those who reject them reject Christ.
Lk. 24:13-36	The resurrected Jesus reveals himself in the Scriptures and the Eucharist.
Lk. 24:44-48	Jesus says that everything written about him in the Law of Moses and the prophets must be fulfilled through his Paschal Mystery.
Jn. 1:1-14	Jesus is the Word, the living Word that takes on our human nature.
Jn. 14:15-17, 25-26	Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to be the Counsellor to be with the apostles forever, who will teach them all things.
Jn. 21:25	Jesus said and did many things not recorded in written form.
1Tim 2:3-4	God wants all to be saved and to come to know the truth.
1Tim 6:20	Paul exhorts the bishop Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him.
2Tim 3:16	Scripture is inspired by God and it is all useful for teaching, for refuting, for correction, and for training in holiness.
1Cor 11:2	The Corinthians maintain the traditions taught to them by Paul.
Heb. 1:1-2	God spoke partially through the prophets, but now has spoken through his Son.
Heb. 4:11-12	The living scriptures are able to open our hearts and lay bare our thoughts in the sight of God.
1Pt. 1:19-21	We possess a prophetic message that is altogether reliable; prophecy cannot be privately interpreted, because it is not human-inspired, but inspired by God.

Catechism

75-79	The Gospel was handed on by the apostles and their successors orally and in writing in every age, there is a living transmission we call Sacred Tradition.
80-83	Sacred Scripture is the speech of God, written down Sacred Tradition transmits the entirety of the Word of God entrusted to the apostles and their successors.
84	The apostles entrusted the Deposit of Faith to the entire Church.
85-86	The bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome interpret revelation; this Magisterium, in interpreting God's Word, is the servant of revelation.
94-95	Through the Holy Spirit, the Church continually grows in understanding the Deposit of Faith; Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium are so connected that they necessarily support one another.
96	The apostles handed on by preaching and writing what Christ entrusted to them.
101	To reveal himself to us, God condescended to speak to us in human words.

- 102, 108 Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word: Jesus Christ, and so Christianity is a religion of the Word, not of a book.
- 103 The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's body.
- 104 In Scripture, the Father lovingly meets and speaks to his children.
- 105-107 Scripture was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by human authors who wrote exactly what God wanted written for our salvation.
- 109-119 Scripture must be read and interpreted as a unity, within the Tradition of the Church, and with the understanding of faith.
- 120 The canon of Scripture was established by Tradition.
- 121-126 The Old and New Testaments form a unity focused on Jesus Christ, with the Gospels holding primacy of place since they describe Jesus' life and teachings.
- 128-130 Through typology, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is unveiled in the New.
- 131, 133 Scripture should be read and studied by the faithful.

(Source: Adapted from RCIA Catechist's Manual, Association for Catechumenal Ministry, Maryland, 2007)

NAVIGATING THE BIBLE

The Bible is the most important collection of books in the Christian Catholic faith. There are 73 different books in the Bible. 46 of these books were written before Jesus was born – these are known together as the Old Testament. 27 books were written after Jesus lived – these are known as the New Testament. All of these books are coded in such a way that we can search for a story in the Bible and find it exactly in any Bible we look in. This is done using shortened names, chapters and verses.

So how do we begin? All books in the Bible are shortened by using two, three and sometimes four letters. They always begin with the first letter of the book, for example, Matthew = Mt.; Jeremiah = Jer; Romans = Rom.

The shortened word is then followed by a number. This number is the chapter for where the story comes from, for example, Jn. 14. This means the story comes from the Gospel according to John, Chapter 14.

This first number is then followed by two other numbers. These numbers refer to the verses, the first number marks the beginning, and the second number the end of the passage you are being asked to read; for example, 12-24.

So, when you are asked to look up a story in the Bible, it appears in the following way: Lk. 5:1-13 (Luke, Chapter 5, beginning with verse 1 and finishing at verse 13).

