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# How Is the Bible God's Letter to Us?

**Catechism** *In the Holy Bible our heavenly Father lovingly meets us and speaks with us (cf. no. 104).*

Can you answer these?

- ✚ What is the best-selling book of all time?
- ✚ What book has been translated into 2,454 languages?
- ✚ What book did George Washington kiss at his inauguration?
- ✚ What book is the origin of the expressions “a good Samaritan,” “a leopard can’t change its spots,” “the blind leading the blind,” and “the patience of Job”?

You’ve probably guessed that the answer to all the questions is the Bible. You hear readings from the Bible at every Mass. You might have your own Bible. There are good reasons why this book is famous and loved. Imagine going to your computer and finding an e-mail from God to you. Wouldn’t you be surprised? What do you think God would write? Actually God does communicate with you through writing. God is the author of the Bible, a book in which God speaks personally to you. Another name for the Bible is **Sacred Scripture**, which means holy writing. People physically wrote the words, but God influenced them to say what he wanted. This divine influence



## BTW

In a Bible reference the name of the book is given followed by the chapter number and then the verse number. John 15:14 means the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 14. Can you find this verse in your Bible?

## Did You Know?

We are to honor the Bible as we honor the Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ.

is called **inspiration**. Although the Bible is a collection of seventy-three different books, God sends one strong message in it: "I love you." In the Bible, over and over again God tells us of his love for us and shows us his love by great saving acts.

## A Two-Part Story

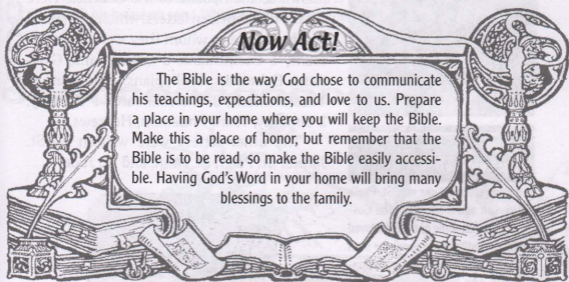
The Bible tells the story of God's relationship with the human race in two parts. This first part, which has forty-six books, is the **Old Testament**. It begins with creation stories and traces the history of God's chosen people, the Israelites. It was through them that God first made a covenant with us and through them he promised a Savior. The second part of the Bible, which has twenty-seven books, is the **New Testament**. This part tells how God sent the Savior, Jesus. The Gospels recount the life and teachings of Jesus, and the Acts of the Apostles gives the history of the early Church. It also includes letters of the first Christians that explain the faith. The last book, Revelation, contains visions that foretell the triumph of Christ.

Both of the Bible's two parts reveal what God is like, who Jesus is, how God saved us, and how to live wisely.

## How to Read the Bible

Like a library, the Bible has different kinds of books, or literary forms, such as historical writing, stories, poetry, and letters. The Church tells us to be mindful of the kind of writing it is as we read each book of the Bible. For example, Jesus told para-

bles, which are fictional stories that illustrate a teaching. You shouldn't think, then, that they actually happened. The Church also tells us to read the books with awareness of the culture of the people who wrote them. Christ, who is the Word of God, helps us understand Scripture through the Holy Spirit. The Church interprets Scripture for us.



## Did You Know?

The symbol for Mark is a lion, Matthew's is a man, Luke's is an ox, and John's is an eagle.

## The Gospels

The heart of Scripture is the four **Gospels**. *Gospel* means "Good News." The Gospels are about Jesus, his life and work and his death and resurrection. Each Gospel is a portrait of Jesus. It tells his story from a particular point of view and for a certain audience. The first three—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are similar. We call them the **Synoptics** (sin-OP-tics), which means "same view." The Gospel of John is unique. The authors credited with writing the Gospels are called **evangelists** (i-VAN-juh-lists), from the Greek for "Good News."

## A Catholic VIP



**St. Luke**  
(First century)

The evangelist St. Luke was St. Paul's companion and a physician. The Gospel of Luke has some of the most loved stories, including those about the birth of Jesus. Luke shows the compassionate Jesus who loves all people, especially the poor. His Gospel is called the Gospel of the Spirit, the Gospel of Prayer, the Gospel of Women, the Gospel of the Poor, and the Gospel of Joy. Besides his Gospel, Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles, considered to be part two of his Gospel. St. Luke's feast day is October 18.

## The Letters

There are twenty-one letters, or **epistles** (i-PIS-uhs), in the Bible. Most of these were written by St. Paul. He began many churches in the first century. Because Paul preached the Gospel to the gentiles (non-Jews), he is known as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Here are the first fourteen letters, which are named for the people to whom they were sent: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews.

The other letters were written by St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude.

### BTW

Here is a jingle to help you remember the first fourteen letters in order so that you can locate verses in them easily:

Ro-Co-Co  
Gal-Eph-Phi  
Col-Thess-Thess  
Tim-Tim-Ti  
Phil-Heb

## Praying with the Bible

Try reading a few verses from the Bible every day. Then think about them. Listen to what God is saying to you personally through the gift of his word.



## Scripture Link

### A House Built on Rock

Jesus told a parable, or story, about living by his Word. A person who acts on God's Word is like a wise man who built his house on rock. When rains fell, floods came, and wind battered the house, it did not fall. Someone who does not act on God's Word is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. When a storm comes, this house collapses.

(cf. Mt 7:24-27)



### BTW

Catholic Bibles have more books than Protestant Bibles. The Church decided on the **canon**, or list of divinely inspired books, in 382 A.D. and officially confirmed it in 1546.

### From My Heart

The Bible's book of Psalms has 150 **psalms** (sahmz). These are prayer songs of praise, sorrow, gratitude, and petition that all Jews prayed, including Jesus and Mary. Today we pray them. Psalm 119, the longest psalm, exclaims how wonderful God's word is. Every eight verses begin with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Pray Psalm 119:97-105.

## *Now Act!*

This Sunday listen carefully to the readings at Mass. The first reading is from a book of the Old Testament. The second reading is from one of the New Testament letters. Then there is a psalm and a reading from one of the Gospels. Try to remember these readings, which together are called the Liturgy of the Word. Did you notice a theme that connected the readings?

## Recap

- God is the author of the Bible, Sacred Scripture.
- The first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, tells the history of God's chosen people.
- The second part of the Bible, the New Testament, recounts the life of Jesus in four Gospels and the history of the early Church.
- We read the Bible aware of its literary forms and Jewish culture.





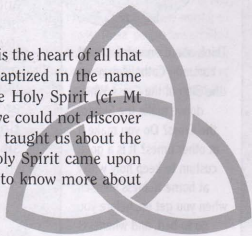
# What Is the Trinity?

**Catechism** *There is one God, who is, however, a Most Holy Trinity: the Father, his only Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. no. 233).*

Life is full of mysteries. The greatest mystery of all is the **Most Holy Trinity**. *Tri* means three, as in *tricycle*. We believe that our one God is three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there is only one God. How can  $1 + 1 + 1$  ever equal  $1$ ? We will never understand how this can be, but we believe it on the word of Jesus.

## A Central Mystery

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the heart of all that Catholics believe. You were or will be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19). The Trinity is one mystery that we could not discover on our own. God revealed it to us. Jesus taught us about the Father and the Holy Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit came upon the Church on Pentecost and guided us to know more about God the Father and God the Son.



## BTW

A triangle with equal sides is a symbol for the Trinity.



## What We Know

The Persons in the Trinity are all God. So each Person is eternal, and each one has equal powers. The Father, though, is the source of the Son. And the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and Son together. We say that the Father *generates* the Son, who is *begotten*. The Holy Spirit *proceeds* from them both. Each Person is distinct. Although the three divine Persons are different from one another, they are one and the same God. We worship all three Persons.

## Comparisons

People have tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity. For example, they compare the Trinity to an egg. There is a shell, egg white, and a yolk but one egg. St. Patrick is famous for using a shamrock to teach about the Trinity. He pointed out that although there are three leaves, there is only one shamrock. The Trinity has been compared to water, too, which has three states: liquid, solid (ice), and gas (steam). These comparisons help, but remember we can never understand this deep mystery of the Godhead.

St. Augustine once saw a boy on a beach pouring water into a pail. He asked, "What are you doing?" The boy replied, "I'm putting the ocean in my pail." "That's impossible," Augustine said. "No more impossible than trying to put the mystery of the Trinity in your human brain," the boy said.

## Brainstorm

Think about one of the most common Catholic prayers: the Sign of the Cross. When do we make the Sign of the Cross? Do you make it at other times? It is a good custom to keep holy water at home to bless yourself when you get up, before you go to bed, and whenever you leave the house.

## Did You Know?

We celebrate Trinity Sunday on the Sunday after the feast of Pentecost Sunday.

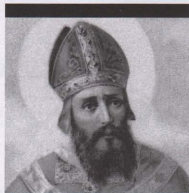
### Work of the Trinity

Whatever God does, all three Persons do. They work together. However, each Person is revealed to us as having a special mission, or task. The Father is responsible for creation. The Son was sent to become a man and save the world. And the Holy Spirit is in charge of guiding the Church and making its members holy.

### Life of the Blessed Trinity

The Persons in the Trinity are a family bound together in a relationship of love. Out of love, God created us to share this divine life. We call God's life in us **sanctifying grace**. Already we are joined to God on earth. God dwells within us. Our destiny is to enter fully into the life of the Trinity. This is what heaven is: union with the great and loving God who made us.

### A Catholic VIP




### St. Patrick (389? – 461?)

St. Patrick is the popular patron saint of Ireland. Born in Britain, Patrick was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland. He finally escaped back to Britain and became a priest. When missionaries, people who spread the faith, were needed to go to Ireland, Patrick volunteered. He was made a bishop and sent to places where people worshiped false gods. These people were called Druids. The Druid priests resisted, but Patrick successfully brought the light of faith to Ireland. St. Patrick's feast day is March 17.

**Jesus's Teachings About God**

- "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (Jn 8:19).
- "The one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him" (Jn 8:26).
- "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38).
- "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn 14:23).
- "The Advocate [Helper], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).



## Did You Know?

God, who is a spirit, is not male or female. It's just a custom to speak about God in male terms because that is how God revealed himself.

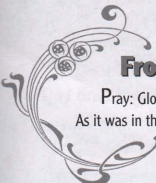


## Scripture Link

### The Baptism of Jesus

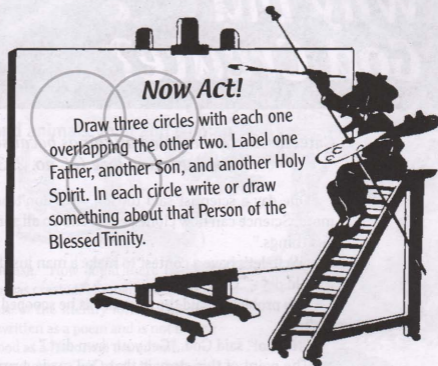
John was a prophet who urged people to give up their sins. He had them baptized, or "washed" in the Jordan River as a sign that they had a change of heart. Before Jesus began preaching, he went to John the Baptist and asked to be baptized. When Jesus was coming out of the water, the heavens opened and the Spirit came down like a dove on him. A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

(cf. Mk 1:9-11)



## From My Heart

Pray: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen.



## Recap

- God is a Holy Trinity, three Persons in one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- The three Persons are eternal and have equal powers.
- Although the Trinity works together, the Father is the creator, the Son is the Savior, and the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, who makes the Church holy.
- Sanctifying grace is the life of the Trinity, which is shared with us.