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The Holy Bible

... the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body.

Catechism, 103

Tolstoy's story *Where Love Is, There Is God Also* vividly illustrates the gift of Scripture. In this story, Martin, the main character, is devastated by the death of his wife. Only reading the Gospel consoled him. Each time he read a chapter, warmth flooded his heart and despair subsided.

One day he read the story of Simon the Pharisee refusing hospitality to Jesus. Martin thought, "If Jesus ever came to my home, I would welcome him with all my heart." At that very moment he heard the words, "Martin, I am coming to your home tomorrow."

Convinced that Jesus was coming, Martin prepared his house for Jesus. The next day he was visited by a tired soldier, a poor woman with her baby, and an old woman with a young boy. Martin treated each of these with affection and hospitality. But he was disappointed. Jesus never came.

That evening, he opened his Bible and read from Matthew 25, "I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you consoled me." Martin noticed a special light had filled his room. Joyously, Martin realized Jesus had indeed come to him in the presence of the needy visitors he had helped that day.

Just as Martin in this story found Jesus in Scripture as well as in his acts of love, so also do we. In the previous chapters we have outlined the basis for our relationship with God. We are born with a capacity for God and an inner drive toward him. This is not a useless passion because God comes toward us with even greater joy and love. This coming of God to us is found in Revelation.

How is this Revelation communicated to us? Through the Bible and Tradition. "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit" (*Dei Verbum*, 9). "And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching" (*Dei Verbum*, 9)" (*Catechism*, 81-82).

Scripture and Tradition flow from the one source, a revealing God. The Church does not derive her certainty about Revelation's truths from the Bible alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted with equal attention and reverence. The *Catechism*, in paragraphs 84-95, outlines the way our faith heritage should be interpreted.

Among all the books of Scripture, the Gospels hold a special place of honor for us, because they tell us about Jesus Christ, his person and his message. The Gospels we read now were formed in three stages:

(1) *The life and teachings of Jesus*. The Church clearly affirms the historicity of the four Gospels. They faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, really did and taught for our salvation, during his life among us until his ascension (cf. *Catechism*, 126).

(2) *The oral Tradition*. What Jesus Christ said and did, the apostles preached to others. They brought to their preaching a deeper knowledge of what they experienced, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth.

(3) *The written Gospels*. "The Sacred authors composed the four Gospels, choosing certain of the numerous elements handed down, either orally or already in writing, editing a synthesis of others, or explaining them in terms of the Church's current situation, and finally keeping the form of preaching, in such a way as always to deliver the honest truth about Jesus to us" (*Catechism*, 126 and *Dei Verbum*, 19; Second Vatican Council, hereafter referred to as SVC).

The strength and power of God's Word provides support and energy for all the Church's members. It gives us a stronger faith, food for our souls, and a rich source for our spiritual life. The study of Scripture should be the soul of theological studies. Teaching religion, preaching homilies, or evangelizing others derives its power, dynamism, and effectiveness from constant contact with Scripture. Studying Scripture is essential for knowing and loving Jesus Christ.

Reflection

What are the three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accord with the Spirit who inspired it?

1. Be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.' Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover. . . .
2. Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church.' According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written princi-

ally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture. . . .

3. *Be attentive to the analogy of faith.* By 'analogy of faith' we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation" (*Catechism*, 112-114).

Prayer

Father, we love you for coming to us and responding to the desire for you which you have planted in our minds and hearts. We thank you for communicating your Revelation in Scripture and Tradition. We treasure the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, which tell us so much about Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. But more than this, we praise you for speaking to us with love through the pages of Scripture as taught to us by our Spirit-guided Church.

Resource

Catechism, 74-141

Glossary

Analogy of Faith. "The coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation" (*Catechism*, 114).

Canon of Scripture. Guided by the apostolic Tradition, the Church discerned which writings were to be included in the Bible. The list is called the "canon of Scripture."

Life Application

1. How often do I read the Bible? How frequently do I think I should read it? Which parts of the Bible appeal to me the most? Why? What do I look for in Scripture? How does my reading of Scripture help me to pray?
2. It is said that people who read Scripture have a greater desire to share their faith with others. How true is this in my life? Who are some relatives and friends I would like to bring back to the Church? What do I find in Scripture devotion which helps me be motivated to share my faith?
3. Why is it important to know the three principles of scriptural interpretation given above in the reflection? How clearly do I appreciate the need to have the Church's guidance in reading Scripture?

Focus

The Church, as early as apostolic times, and then constantly in her Tradition, has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant pre-figurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son.

Christians therefore read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament; but it must not make us forget that [it] retains its own intrinsic value as Revelation reaffirmed by our Lord himself. Besides, the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament. As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.

Catechism, 128-129

I Believe in God

“I believe in God”: this first affirmation of the Apostles’ Creed is also the most fundamental.

Catechism, 199

“Nine in ten Americans say they have never doubted the existence of God and eight in ten believe they will face God on Judgment Day. Eight in ten also believe that God works miracles today and say they are ‘sometimes very conscious of God.’ 90 percent of Americans pray and 88 percent believe that God loves them” (*The People’s Religion*, pp. 45, 56).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins with an explanation of the creed, the faith professed by Catholics. And the first statement of the creed is about faith in God. A creed summarizes what Catholics believe. The two creeds most often used are the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.

The Apostles’ Creed is considered to be a summary of the faith of the apostles. It is the ancient baptismal creed of the Church of Rome. The Nicene Creed was composed at the first two ecumenical councils – Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. We pray this creed at our celebration of the Eucharist.

Faith in God

Faith affirms there is only one God. God asks the world to come to him alone. “Turn to me and be safe” (Isa 45:22). Jesus teaches that God is the only Lord and we should love him (see Mk 12:29-30).

Because our faith experiences the boundless love of God for us, it moves us to return that love. Our faith motivates us to love all people because God loves them. We use creation to draw nearer to God and we avoid what separates us from the Lord.

Who Is God?

Moses met God at the burning bush. God commissioned him to save his people from slavery. Moses told God that his people would wonder about the name of the one who sent him. God replied, “[T]ell the Israelites, I AM sent me to you” (read Ex 3:4-14).

In Scripture, the name expresses the essence of the person. God is not an abstract force or a vague destiny. God is an “I” to whom we can and must reply. This powerful “I” of God promises to hear our cries for love and mercy

and save us. The "I Am" means God is always here, faithfully present to care for us.

At the same time, God remains a holy mystery. At the burning bush, Moses took off his sandals and bowed in reverence. God reveals and conceals himself. We can never know fully the immense mystery of God. God alone IS. We become. We grow from childhood to old age. God IS. What we are we have from God. The bush burned without being consumed. God IS.

Ultimately the answer to God's identity is love. God is love.

"Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Jesus reveals and fully realizes the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush. On the Cross that divine love-name burst forth like the sun. "When you lift up the Son of Man [on the Cross], then you will realize that I AM" (Jn 8:28).

In all the Easter narratives, the risen Jesus requires faith in order to know him. Our spiritual journey always begins with faith: "I believe in God."

Reflection

1. Why does our faith speak of "one" God?

"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD . . ." (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29)" (Catechism, 228).

2. What does our faith in God mean for us?

"Faith in God leads us to turn to him alone as our first origin and our ultimate goal, and neither to prefer anything to him nor to substitute anything for him" (Catechism, 229).

3. Can we know God completely?

"Even when he reveals himself, God remains a mystery beyond words: 'If you understood him, it would not be God' (St. Augustine, *Sermo* 52, 6, 16: PL 38:360 and *Sermo* 117, 3, 5: PL 38, 663)" (Catechism, 230).

Prayer

I believe in you, my God. I praise you for revealing yourself to us as I AM, an "I" who loves and cares for us. I praise your majesty and exult in your glory. I ask you to help me never to refuse you anything. I need your help to make you the beginning and end of all I am and have. Glory be to you, O God.

Resource

Catechism, 185-231

Glossary

Apostles' Creed. A true summary of the faith of the apostles. It is the ancient baptismal creed of the Church.

I AM. The name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

Mystery. When applied to God, this term implies some insight into God's inner life. At the same time, we will never know God fully in this world.

Nicene Creed. This was composed at the first two ecumenical councils, Nicaea in 325 and First Constantinople in 381. We use it at our Sunday Eucharists.

Life Application

1. Suppose I met someone who said that faith in God is unimportant. What would I say? Would I try to argue the person into faith? If so, what arguments would I use? Or would I ask the person to explain his resistance to believing in God?
2. How can I tell from my own experience that God is mystery? Generally, what do I know about God? What don't I know? How could prayer help me know God better?
3. What should I do to deepen my faith in God? How does the Church help me with my faith? How do my family and friends advance my faith in God?

Focus

I seek not, O Lord, to search out Thy depth, but I desire in some measure to understand Thy truth, which my heart believeth and loveth. Nor do I seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this too I believe, that unless I first believe, I shall not understand.

... right order requires that we believe the deep things of the Christian religion before presuming to subject them to the ... test of reason, so on the other hand it looks to me like indolent neglect if, already established in the faith, we do not take the trouble to gain an intellectual intimacy with what we believe.

St. Anselm in *English Spirituality*