



# Introduction

## *The Heart of Our Faith*

The subject of this book can be summarized by the Greek word *kerygma*, which translates as “a basic message, the very heart of something great and eventful.” In the ancient world, *kerygma* was associated with the actions of a person—the *kerux*, who was a messenger who ran from village to village bringing the most important news from the ruler. Sometimes the subject of the news was the outcome of an important battle or the succession of power from a king to his successor. The *kerux* announced the “headline,” which was known as the *kerygma*. While there was always more news that followed the *kerux*’s initial visit, it was this herald of important news that had the potential to change everyday life for those who heard it. The Christian *kerygma* has this same effect, but in a much more profound way.

The *kerygma*, or basic message of our Catholic faith, was first announced by the Apostles and other evangelizers who stood in the public square to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. While the Apostles preached in different places to people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and sometimes adapted the Gospel message as such, they were sure to express very clearly four constant truths of the

*kerygma* that have stood the test of time ever since. In fact, they are as relevant for you and me today as to those who first heard the core of the message. The subject of the *kerygma* is a message that stands in perpetuity of the human experience. It is summarized as follows:

### *Creation*

You were created to be in union with God. God has a loving plan for humanity that includes a plan for your life. You were made to be in relationship with God. “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God” (1 Jn 3:1).

### *Fall*

Sadly, this union is broken by sin. Sin separated our first parents (Adam and Eve) from God, and our own sins can have eternal consequences. Sin keeps us from the relationship with God that we are intended to have. “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

### *Redemption*

Fortunately, God has the answer. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Jesus Christ, true God and true man, allows himself to be sacrificed on the Cross so that our relationship with God might be healed. From the Cross, Jesus gives us the Church and her sacraments so that we might have eternal life.





### *Restoration*

Furthermore, God invites you to live in the way you were created to live, and to lead others to Jesus by your words and actions. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).





This four-part message of *kerygma* is the very kernel of our Catholic faith.

## How the *Kerygma* Is Shared

Whereas the *kerygma* expresses the very basis of our faith in Jesus Christ and our life in his Church, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* articulates and provides depth to the teachings of the Church. We can refer to the teachings of the *Catechism* as *echoes of the kerygma*. In fact, the root of the word *catechism* is the word *echo*. If you look closely, you can see most of the word “**echo**” contained in the word “**catechism**.”

By following the outline of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and by faithfully relating its teachings, this book will show how the inspiring, basic-message *kerygma* of  Creation,  Fall,  Redemption, and  Restoration has grown into an impressive body of teaching of Catholic beliefs, practices, morality, and prayer. As you proceed through this book, these four aspects of the *kerygma* will be noted at the end of each chapter to relate specific teachings of the Church that you have learned about to one or more aspects of the *kerygma*. In this way, you will be able to imagine our Catholic faith growing like a small acorn into a mighty oak.

We will call these symbols *kerygmatic echoes*, for they will show how the original message of Christian *kerygma* echoes throughout the entire body of Catholic thought and life today. Everything that we believe, practice, live, and pray can be traced back to the fundamental message of the *kerygma*:

-  You are created for a purpose by a loving God. God has a plan for you.
-  The tragedy of sin, the tragedy of “missing the mark” in your relationship with God, can have deadly, eternal consequences.
-  God has the answer. God sent his Son into the world to pay the price for your sins. The ransom is paid and your freedom is secured through the Blood of Jesus shed from the Cross and the sacramental life of the Church that flows from his wounded side. By his love, you are redeemed.
-  God will never stop calling you to repentance and conversion. But God does not give you all the time in the world. There is great urgency to

God’s invitation to make a commitment to follow him. If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart (cf. Ps 95:8, Heb 3:15).

Think about this: When you yell “Hello” into a canyon or tunnel, the word softens in volume with each successive echo. Echoes in nature diminish in volume and intensity, like ripples from a stone thrown on a pond. Not so with kerygmatic echoes and the proclamation of the Catholic faith. With each successive proclamation of the *kerygma* in word and deed, our words grow louder and our faith grows stronger. Though tyrants may rage and put to death good and faithful Christians, the echo of the *kerygma* resounds with otherworldly intensity. In every age, God raises up great witnesses to the faith—women and men, girls and boys who would give their lives before compromising their belief in Jesus Christ. God’s grace is made manifest in the witness to the *kerygma* given by the holy martyrs of every age. As you learn more about the Catholic faith through this book and through your study of the *Catechism*, always remember that our faith is a living faith, a faith that grows stronger every time it is expressed in word or deed. The kerygmatic echoes grow only louder as our Catholic faith is proclaimed anew.

## Using This Book

Because you are reading this book, you are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith. Perhaps you are curious about what Catholics believe, or you are thinking about becoming a Catholic, or you are already Catholic and want to learn more about your faith. Whatever the reason, I am glad that you have opened this book, and I encourage you to read it from cover to cover and encourage others to do the same.

*A Journey through the Catechism* is organized in four parts that follow the same four-part structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Each part has chapters that begin with a short introduction and then proceed with related questions and answers around the particular topic. You may read the book straight through, or you may choose chapters to read based on topics of personal interest or as part of a group study, for example in

a catechumenal process like the Order of Christian Initiation. If you are using this book as part of your Christian initiation, you will also find helpful a chart listing the Sunday readings, reflection questions on the Sunday readings, and collations with questions in this book at [www.avemariapress.com/journey-through-the-catechism](http://www.avemariapress.com/journey-through-the-catechism). You may also use the index of questions to locate topics about the faith in which you are interested.

## ***How to Navigate the Bible***

References to the Holy Bible are given not by page numbers, but by book, chapter, and verse. These references are usually abbreviated. A list of the abbreviations used in this book for each book of the Holy Bible is found on page 399. For example, Dt 5:6–21 means the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 5, verses 6 through 21. Every Bible has a table of contents for those who are as yet unfamiliar with the name, classification, and order of the books of the Bible.

Footnotes, glossaries, maps, and introductions to each book of the Holy Bible are included in most any edition and presented as helps to the reader. They are not considered to be the *inspired* Word of God. More information on inspiration will follow as well.



You will find in this book plentiful references to Sacred Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I encourage you to have at hand both a Bible and a *Catechism* as you study the Catholic faith. Both are available to read free of charge online, or to purchase secondhand for less than a couple of visits to a coffee shop.

What kind of Bible should you have? Billy Graham once answered this very question with “One that you will read.” My answer is the same, with a recommendation that you have a *Catholic* Bible, one that does not omit seven important books of the Old Testament as is the case in many *Protestant* Bibles. Perhaps you didn’t even know there were different types of Bibles. This issue will be addressed as you read through this book.

To be more specific, most of the Scripture citations in *A Journey through the Catechism* come from the *New American Bible, revised edition* (NABRE), while a few come from the Catholic edition of the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) or its later edition, the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). I endorse each of these translations of the Sacred Scriptures to accompany your reading of this book. They are all printed in various trim sizes and designs, with different weights of paper, and in hard or soft cover. In choosing the format of your Bible, I endorse the words of Reverend Graham: Pick one that you will read, carry with you, and cherish. The Bible is God’s Word speaking to you, and you should read from your Bible every day.

Besides having a copy of the Bible, you should also read this book accompanied by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition, revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II. This edition also includes a revision of paragraph 2267 on the subject of the death penalty that was promulgated by Pope Francis. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a treasury of information, combining many verses from the Bible, the teachings of great saints from every age and place, and citations from the Fathers of the Church, including several who were taught by St. John the Apostle, the beloved disciple who was close to our Lord and who took care of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



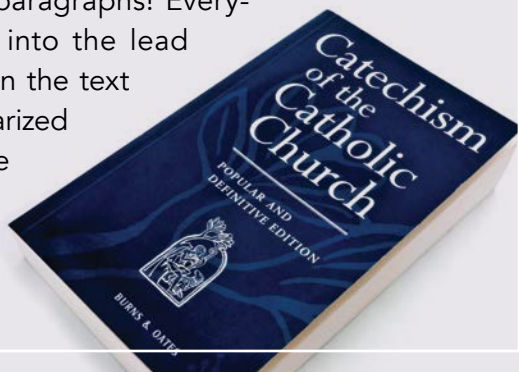
## ***How to Navigate the Catechism of the Catholic Church***

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is abbreviated CCC. References to the *Catechism* are given not by page numbers but by paragraph numbers. The numbers in the outer margin near each paragraph are cross-references to other *Catechism* paragraphs related to the same topic.

For example, CCC, 1428 teaches about ongoing conversion in the context of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The paragraph numbers in the outer margin tell us that the topic of conversion is also taught in CCC, 1036 (the call to conversion), CCC, 853 (the way of penance and renewal), and CCC, 1996 (the teaching that God's grace prompts us to conversion). The threads of Church teaching on particular topics wind through all four parts of the *Catechism*, creating a beautiful fabric of consistency, a symphony of faith in four movements.

The *Catechism* thoroughly quotes other writings of the saints and popes and several Church documents. These quotations are footnoted and abbreviated at the bottom of each page. A key to the abbreviations used in the footnotes is included in the *Catechism*, usually in the appendix, between the glossary and the index.

The *Catechism* paragraphs are introduced by lead paragraphs for particular sections. Don't be intimidated by the denseness of the lead paragraphs! Everything that is squeezed into the lead paragraph is unpacked in the text that follows and is summarized in the *In Brief* notes at the end of each section.



Although the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* comes in several free online versions, I recommend that you have your own printed edition of the *Catechism*, if possible. If you want to go deeper into any subject that I have taught in this book, you can find a reference to it in the *Catechism*. A printed edition will allow you to keep handwritten questions or notes that come up in the reading of this book and that you cross-reference in the *Catechism*.

## Let's Get Started!

As we get ready to proceed with learning about the teachings of the Catholic faith, I am reminded of the words of Herb Brooks, the coach of the famous “Miracle on Ice” United States hockey team that upset the powerful Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympics. In a pregame speech before the gold-medal game, Brooks said to his team: “You were born to be a player. You were meant to be here. This moment is yours.”<sup>1</sup> For the young, inexperienced players, it was a moment that permanently changed them, a moment that would forever impact the trajectory of their lives.

You too were born for much more than you can imagine. You are meant for God. You are meant to share a life with the Almighty God here on earth and in eternity. You are meant to live with God and enjoy great happiness that will last longer than the sun and the moon and the stars. By picking up this book, you have taken the first step to discover or deepen your connection to God and to delve more deeply into the great mystery of your relationship with Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. This book is intended to guide you along this journey. Be assured as you read this book that you are loved by God, and God has a plan for you.

In one of his Father Brown short stories, the late G. K. Chesterton (d. 1936) used the figurative image of “an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let [someone] wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread.”<sup>2</sup> This image helps illustrate how we are always connected to God. He so desires you to be on the right path in life that he stays connected to you in ways you cannot possibly imagine. Yet God’s plan for you and for every human



being is made known through the teachings of Jesus Christ as contained (or revealed) in Sacred Scripture (or the Holy Bible) and the Sacred Tradition (or the Tradition of the Catholic Church), particularly as they are articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The book you are holding in your hands will guide you through the *Catechism* with a special view to helping you understand and appreciate more fully God's great plan for you and God's powerful action in your life. No matter your age or situation, you are connected to the God who gives a "twitch upon the thread" at exactly the right moment. That twitch, however and whenever it is given, calls you to repentance and conversion, a change of mind and heart, and challenges you to get things right with God. This "twitch upon the thread" is a metaphor for the essence of the Gospel and is the kernel of everything we believe about the power of Jesus Christ to rescue us from that which can bring eternal harm to our immortal souls. This is the fundamental message of our Catholic faith, the *kerygma*.



Part I

# WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary.  
To one without faith, no explanation is possible.

—St. Thomas Aquinas





## CHAPTER 1

# *Faith: We Are Made for God* (CCC, 26–141)

Scientists tell us that the universe is ninety-six billion light years in size. That huge number is how long it would take to get from one end of the universe to the other traveling at the speed of light, some 186,000 miles per second. Like the Hubble Telescope before it, the James Webb Space Telescope of today brings us stunning and previously unimaginable views of distant planets and galaxies that give us insight into the question posed to God by the psalmist:

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and stars that you set in place—  
What is man that you are mindful of him,  
and a son of man that you care for him?  
O LORD, our LORD,  
how awesome is your name through all the earth!  
Psalm 8:4–5, 10

We begin our search buoyed by the fact that in spite of God’s immensity, he “reveals and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man

a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life” (CCC, 26).

## 1. We cannot see God. How can we come to know that he exists?

We can know from our human nature that God exists. God has made human beings to be different from all other animals. We can certainly take great delight in the magnificence of the world of nature and in the capacity of animals to make for themselves what is needed for their existence: the spider’s web, the beaver’s dam, the robin’s nest. While each of these creations shows fascinating and intricate design, only human beings make works of art, monuments to fallen heroes, and feats of design that show their capacity to go beyond what is necessary and to give expression to the desire to be creative.

*Ars gratia artis* is the motto surrounding the famous lion at the beginning of every MGM movie: “Art for art’s sake.” Among the creatures on this earth, human beings alone possess the ability to transcend the merely practical and to seek the meaning and purpose of their lives. We alone long with all of our being for truth, beauty, and goodness. We seek beyond the limited to what is infinite. We cannot help but ask questions about the origin of the vast universe, and whether there is a God who is its source and origin (cf. CCC, 33).

## 2. Do we have proof that there is a God?

We can use our intellect, that is, our rational mind, to know with certainty that everything we see around us has a cause. The oak tree came from the acorn, the baby came from his or her parents. And every cause has a cause of its own. We can trace our own existence through the generations of our forebears. We can go back and back into the origins of our planet and our universe, but we cannot go back infinitely. There had to be a *first cause*, some uncreated thing or person to set everything in motion.

That “first cause” is what we call God. This is one of five proofs offered by St. Thomas Aquinas of God’s existence. There are other proofs as well

that demonstrate how we human beings can come to know that there is a God by using our rational abilities. The Church expresses this succinctly by teaching, “God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world, by the natural light of human reason” (*Dei Verbum*, 6).

### 3. If there is proof for God’s existence, why doesn’t everyone believe?

Our rational mind gives us the amazing ability to discover, to analyze, and to create. Sadly, our mind can be deceived. The tragedy of war, injustice, and senseless violence are sufficient to demonstrate that we are prone to sin and error. One of those errors is that many fail to acknowledge through human reason the existence of God.

St. Paul speaks about those in his day who did not believe in God and whose minds had become darkened in spite of all the evidence for God’s existence:

For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise, they became fools. (Rom 1:20–22)

Perhaps St. Paul’s words grate against contemporary sensibilities. Sadly, in the quest for truth about the origin of all things, some who presently deny the existence of God have been given poor directions along the way or have been taught deliberate falsehoods. It is not polite to call someone a fool, yet the opposite of foolishness is wisdom.

The wise person seeks the truth about the nature of all things. The wise person seeks justice when deceived by the false promises of a con artist. The wise person seeks the way to everlasting life. Thankfully, one



is never too old to grow in wisdom, and the desire for transcendence that lies deep within the human heart can never be fully extinguished. There is hope even for the most hardened atheist (cf. CCC, 37).

#### 4. Can we know everything about God through our human reason?

We are religious creatures. Human beings are created with a capacity for transcendence, a capacity for God. The “desire for God is written in the human heart” (CCC, 27). Furthermore, there is a bond between God and the people God has created, such that there is something missing at the very core of our being when we exclude God.

By our reason we can know that there is a God, yet there are limits to what we can know about God through reason alone. Even with what we can discover through human reason, it is impossible for our words to describe God perfectly. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that “we cannot grasp what he is, but only what he is not, and how other beings stand in relation to him” (cited in CCC, 43). For example, we can say that “God is good,” but he is so far beyond our limited conception of goodness that the statement, though true, does not fully comprehend God’s goodness.

Although God is our Creator, we simply cannot know through our own reason or intellect many things about God. Nor can we fully appreciate what we do discover about him through reason. Fortunately, what mere human reason cannot provide on its own is assisted by God’s self-Revelation to humanity.

God comes to meet us, to teach us about himself and his plan for us. We speak of this process of God’s self-Revelation as *Divine Revelation*, the gradual unveiling of God’s plan for humanity. We all have known teachers who were experts at pedagogy, the method and practice of teaching. God is a teacher *par excellence*. God has a “divine pedagogy” by which we will come to know not simply that there is a God, but that God is deeply in love with human beings, the creatures who bear his image and likeness (CCC, 50).

## 5. How does divine pedagogy work? How does God teach us about himself?

God is the master teacher, and so he teaches gradually and patiently. A mathematics teacher does not teach calculus until the student has first studied algebra. In the same way, God did not teach our forebears in the faith everything about himself all at once. Only gradually did God reveal himself to the world through his words and mighty deeds. God's early self-Revelation to the people of Israel was to prepare them and the world for the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ (cf. CCC, 51–53).

God's self-Revelation was accomplished over the course of many centuries, all according to his plan and through many stages. The initial stages were recorded in the first five books of the Bible, the Jewish Torah, or *Pentateuch* ("five books" in Greek):

- God revealed himself to our first parents, giving them the experience of profound closeness to him, walking and talking with God "in the cool of the day" (Gn 3:8, cf. CCC, 54).
- Even after their fall from grace, God would give the first human beings the "hope of salvation and the promise of redemption" (CCC, 55). In a glimpse of the great things to come, and in what is called the *protoevangelium* or "the first proclamation of the Gospel," God warned the tempter and predicted the ultimate victory of good over evil: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike his heel" (Gn 3:15, NRSV).
- Through his covenant with Noah, God gave expression to the principle that all people and nations would be saved. God gave hope to those who would live according to the covenant of Noah, thus giving hope for those who would await the Savior, Jesus Christ, who would "gather into one the dispersed children of God" (Jn 11:52, cf. CCC, 56–58).
- God called Abraham to be the father of a multitude of nations, telling him that his descendants would be "as countless as the stars of the sky

and the sands of the seashore” (Gn 22:17, cf. CCC, 59–61). The descendants of Abraham, the Chosen People who were heirs to this promise, would “prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church. They would be the root onto which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe” (CCC, 60).

- Abraham’s descendants would make their way to Egypt, where they would become enslaved by Pharaoh. God delivered his people from slavery through his mighty deeds recorded in the Book of Exodus and the Book of Deuteronomy. Through their forty-year passage through the desert, God formed his people Israel, teaching them his commandments through Moses and revealing himself as the one, true God. This people, the first to hear God’s Word, would soon be taught by the prophets to look for the Savior who was to come (cf. CCC, 62–63).

## 6. Who were the prophets?

The word *prophet* means “one who speaks for God.” While the prophets often foretold the future, sometimes in stunning detail, their primary role was to call the people of Israel to conversion of heart and fidelity to God’s covenant, so that they might be ready for the coming of the Savior.

The major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The minor prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets are labeled major and minor based on the length of their writings. The writings of the major and minor prophets are in their eponymous books found in the Old Testament. “Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts” (CCC, 64).

## 7. When were the words of the prophets fulfilled?

In Jesus Christ, God reveals himself in a definitive way. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a Son, whom he made

heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (Heb 1:1–2). God has nothing more to say than what he says in his “one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word” (CCC, 65).

## 8. Will God have any further Revelation for us?

We expect no further public revelation from God until the Second Coming of his Son at the end of time. God has said all that he needs to say, and his divine Word can be found in Scripture and apostolic Tradition. Both Scripture and apostolic Tradition are handed on by the Church and aid us in deciphering the full significance of God’s public revelation.

Through the centuries, some have experienced private revelations, and some of these have been recognized by the Church as authentic. Examples include the visions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus experienced by the seventeenth-century mystic St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the nineteenth-century apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette in the village of Lourdes, France. These and other approved private revelations do not add to God’s definitive Revelation in Jesus Christ, but they help those of a particular moment in history to live out more fully their faith in Jesus.

On the other hand, we cannot accept “‘revelations’ that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such ‘revelations’” (CCC, 67). The Church of Latter-Day Saints, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Seventh-Day Adventists are examples of recent sects that have incorrectly claimed further disclosures to God’s Revelation.

## 9. What is God’s plan for communicating his Revelation in our day and age?

Since the coming into the world of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, this has been God’s plan for communicating his Revelation:



## ***Professions of Faith***

### **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son,  
our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy  
Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was  
buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again  
from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of  
God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.

### **The Nicene Creed**

I believe in one God,  
the Father the almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth, of  
all things visible and  
invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus  
Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before  
all ages.





God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consub-  
stantial with the Father;  
through him all things were  
made.

For us men and for our salva-  
tion he came down from  
heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incar-  
nate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate, he  
suffered death and was  
buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the  
Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is  
seated at the right hand  
of the Father.

He will come again in glory to  
judge the living and the  
dead  
and his kingdom will have no  
end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the  
Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father  
and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the  
prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic,  
and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the  
forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resur-  
rection of the dead  
and the life of the world to  
come.

Amen.

- First, God’s full Revelation, accomplished in the Divine Person of Jesus Christ, was communicated through the preaching of the twelve Apostles. Jesus sends forth his Apostles with the words, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:19–20). Filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles traveled far and wide, passing on to others what they had received personally from Jesus Christ.
- Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the twelve Apostles and those who knew them “committed the message of salvation to writing” (*Dei Verbum*, 7, cited in CCC, 76). These writings are found in the New Testament.
- God’s Revelation comes to us not through the Bible alone, but also through the living Tradition of the Church, the very Church that gave birth to the Bible (cf. CCC, 78). Sacred Tradition includes all the teachings handed on by the Apostles from Jesus Christ. These teachings are witnessed in the Church’s practice, including her worship, her prayers, and her celebration of the sacraments. St. Paul speaks of this living Tradition when he calls the Church the “pillar and the foundation of truth” (1 Tm 3:15).

God intends to reveal himself to all people in every age. Indeed, God “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4).

## 10. What is the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition?

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition both flow from the same font of Divine Revelation. They are closely bound to each other. Each one makes present and fruitful the mystery of Christ in the Church. Christ promised to remain with the Church until the end of time (cf. CCC, 80).



Though they flow from the same font, Sacred Scripture and Tradition are distinct modes of transmission:

- Sacred Scripture is God’s speech, “put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, 81).
- Sacred Tradition transmits the Word of God in its entirety, that Word that has been communicated through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. That Word is transmitted to the successors of the Apostles, so that they may preserve and spread the Word through their teaching and preaching (cf. CCC, 82).

We are to honor Scripture and Tradition with equal sentiment and devotion (cf. CCC, 82). The Scriptures were born from the Church in that the New Testament books were written by the Apostles and their coworkers and that it was their successors, the bishops, who discerned what books belonged in the Bible. However, the Church does not teach by Scripture alone. St. Paul, who contributes more words to the New Testament than any other author, praises those who “hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you” (1 Cor 11:2). There is great beauty in the interplay between Sacred Scripture, which is fully accessible to us through the Holy Bible, and Sacred Tradition, which is fully available to us through the teachings, prayers, sacraments, structure, and fellowship of our Catholic Church that is vibrant and alive.

While it is wonderful to learn about these matters of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, there is nothing that compares with entering more deeply into them through the Church, which keeps each alive. It is like comparing the reading of the rules of baseball with the thrill of attending a major league game. More aptly, it is like comparing sitting in the stands with playing on the field. We are all to be participants in knowing about and sharing Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

In fact, the heritage of the faith is entrusted by the Apostles to the whole Church. Every member of the Church is responsible for preserving

and passing on the Deposit of Faith contained in Scripture and Tradition (cf. CCC, 84). We do this depending on our particular vocations:

- The bishops, in communion with the pope and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, exercise the teaching office or *Magisterium* of the Church. Theirs is the task of interpreting authentically Scripture and Tradition amidst the circumstances of our times (cf. CCC, 85).
- The faithful, who live out the faith in their daily lives, have the responsibility and duty to pass on to others the truth that has been revealed by God through Scripture and Tradition (cf. CCC, 91).

The Church teaches, “The whole body of the faithful . . . cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals” (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). This mysterious, God-given *sense of the faithful* plays an important role both in preserving the integrity of the faith and in applying the faith to the circumstances of our day and age (cf. CCC, 92–93).

We must also distinguish between Tradition, sometimes called “tradition with a capital T,” and the various traditions by which the Church in various times and places has expressed the greater Tradition. These traditions are subject to modification or even suppression should they no longer serve their purpose. An example would be the past tradition in some Catholic parishes in which men and women sat on opposite sides of the main aisle, a tradition that largely disappeared in the early twentieth century (cf. CCC, 83).

By God’s wise arrangement and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium support one another like a three-legged stool. Each in its own way, and all three working together, contribute to the salvation of souls (cf. CCC, 95).

## 11. My Protestant friends bring their Bibles to church. My Catholic friends do not. What exactly does the Church teach about the Bible?

While most Catholics do not bring their Bibles to church, the prayers and readings of the Mass are profoundly Scriptural. In many ways, participating in Holy Mass is a way of experiencing the Scripture coming alive. Nevertheless, here are the key teachings of the Church on the Holy Bible:

- **The Church has a close bond with the Scriptures, a bond that comes both from producing and being nourished by them.** “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord” (*Dei Verbum*, 21).
- **The Scriptures bring us into an encounter with the living God.** In the words of St. Jerome, the fourth-century translator of the texts of the Scriptures into Latin, the vernacular language of the day, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”
- **“God is the author of Sacred Scripture”** (CCC, 105). God made use of human authors, who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, used their God-given talents and abilities to write whatever God wanted, and no more (cf. CCC, 106).
- **The Scriptures are inerrant.** The Scriptures teach without error the truth that God wants us to know for our salvation (cf. CCC, 107).
- **Christianity is a religion of the Word of God, not a religion of a book.** The Eternal Word, through the Holy Spirit, makes the Scriptures come alive and opens our minds to their meaning (cf. CCC, 108).
- **The Scriptures are to be read literally and are to be understood according to standard rules of literary interpretation** (cf. CCC, 116). This means that texts must be read according to their respective genres; for example, some passages are historical, some are poetic, and some are parables.

- **The Scriptures are also to be read spiritually.** They have deep spiritual meaning in three particular ways:
  1. The *allegorical sense*, for the Scripture relates events that have deeper significance in Jesus Christ;
  2. The *moral sense*, for the Scriptures teach us how to live according to God's will; and
  3. The *anagogical sense*, from a Greek word that means "to lead," for the Scriptures contain deeper meaning related to the eternal destiny of the soul, the Church, and the world (cf. CCC, 117).
- **There is a unity between the Old Testament and the New Testament.** The Old Testament is indispensable (cf. CCC, 121), for the Old Testament books "bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of God's saving love" (CCC, 122). From the earliest days, the Church has believed that "the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New" (CCC, 129).

The Holy Bible is very important to Catholics. If you attend daily Mass each day for three successive years, you will hear proclaimed aloud vast swaths of the Bible, including nearly 90 percent of the Gospels. Also, notice how many Scripture citations are listed in the footnotes of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

## 12. Why is the Catholic Bible different from the Protestant Bible?

In fact, Catholics and Protestants agree upon the list of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Martin Luther moved all or parts of seven Old Testament books (Baruch, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Sirach, Tobit, and Wisdom) to the appendix of what became the "Protestant Bible," considering them not to be part of the Sacred Scriptures but still worthy of the attention of Christians. The *King James Bible* and many subsequent Protestant Bibles have been printed without that appendix, considering them *not* to be part of the Sacred Scriptures, even though they have been

accepted by the Church since ancient times. The complete list of books in the Catholic Bible can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 120.



## Chapter Summary and Reflection

You were born for much more than this world. You are meant for God. You are connected to a God who loves you more than you can imagine. To you belongs the life-changing call to discover your connection to God, or to delve more deeply into the great mystery of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

Guided by the Magisterium, both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition will accompany you along your journey of faith where you will discover the incredible richness of what God has done for you, and of all that God intends for you. Your faith in Jesus Christ is your entry into eternal life. You are meant to live with God and enjoy great happiness that will last longer than the sun and the moon and the stars. You are loved by God. God has a plan for you.

### *Creation*

Every person has his or her own set of gifts, talents, interests, aptitudes, and strengths. What part of you reveals God's plan for your life?

### *Fall*

Time is the great equalizer. No matter how rich or poor, everyone has the same twenty-four hours of opportunities and challenges each day. What are the bad habits that have crept into your life that keep you from

responding to God's call to love him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength?

### *Redemption*

God exercises his divine pedagogy in revealing himself to human beings, culminating in his definitive self-Revelation through Jesus Christ. How have you experienced God's divine pedagogy in your life? How have witnesses to the *kerygma* helped you to grow in your relationship with the Lord over the course of the years?

### *Restoration*

Regular Bible reading is vital in the Christian life. What is your plan for reading and study? Do you think you could ever read the entire Bible in a year? How might you devote fifteen minutes per day to Bible reading?