

Class #3: Tradition: Passing on the faith

Class Goals

To come to a greater understanding of the meaning of tradition itself, its origins and historical processes, and how these aspects influence a "living faith." In other words, how is the faith in the message and teaching of Jesus Christ passed on from one generation to the next?

Overview:

Tradition is the **ongoing reinterpretation** of the Church's doctrine and self-understanding. Tradition is not a crystal ball of fossilized ideas and beliefs that is passed on from one generation to the next. Rather, it is the living sense of the Christian community and its place in the world as a dialogue partner with other communities (CCC, #78). The focus of this class is God's action in human history.

Definitions of the term "tradition:"

"The deposit of faith is the same, but the manner in which it is communicated is different" (Bl. Pope John XXIII).

"Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living" (Jaroslav Pelikan).

"Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire" (Gustav Mahler)

Tradition is the historical process by which the church hands on the mystery of Christ as living and active in every age. (Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*).

Key terms:

HISTORICAL PROCESS
CHURCH HANDS ON
MYSTERY OF CHRIST
LIVING AND ACTIVE
EVERY AGE

Resources:

- a. S. Rehrauer, Chapter Two in *Theology for Today's Catholic*. Liguori Press, 2005, 35-70.
- b. G. Tavard, "Tradition" in NDT, 1037-1041.
- c. Introduction and Prologue to CCC.
- d. C. Burgaleta, *Manual de la Teología para los Católicos de hoy*. Liguori Press, 2009.

Core Content:

Tradition deals with passing on or spreading the faith.

1. Tradition is the ongoing reinterpretation of the Church's doctrine and self-understanding. Tradition is not a crystal ball of fossilized ideas and beliefs that is passed on from one generation to the next. Rather, it is the living sense of the Christian community and its place in the world as a dialogue partner with other communities (CCC, #78). Tradition is "living faith." How is faith passed on from one generation to the next? The late Blessed Pope John XXIII once said: "The deposit of faith is the same, but the manner in which it is communicated is different." What does this mean?
2. Tradition is defined as passing on the beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and sacred texts in the Church to the next generation. (*The Handbook for Today's Catholic*, 44-46).
3. Historically, tradition began in oral form (apostles and first disciples). Then there was a need to codify the teaching of Jesus – in written form (which eventually became the bible in 391 CE and other writings).
4. Tradition involves the central core of Gospel experience: Jesus – apostles – world. Passing on the fire of the Gospel (Easter vigil).
5. Tradition is not the same as traditionalism. Traditionalism: over-emphasis on anything other than the core content of the Gospel, such as, the Latin language to the exclusion of vernacular expressions (e.g., new translation of Mass in 2011), exclusion of women, kinds of clothing, details of ritual.
6. How must tradition be adapted to the present century? One must read the signs of the times, that is, moments of opportunity for building community. For example, the Internet, social media and networking, and technological innovation are such opportunities. What are the new methods, new approaches for evangelization, with Internet tools?

Small Group Discussion

1. One author (Canon Drinkwater) sums up what might be a definition for tradition: "You educate to some extent...by what you say, more by what you do, and still more by what you are; but most of all by the things you love." Is this a true summary? Why, or why not?

2. Explain the definitions of tradition by Pelikan and Dvorak.

3. How did you come to know the faith? What was your first experience of prayer? Who taught you? Do you remember any rituals? Was someone present to help you?

Perform the script on the meaning of tradition and discuss

Script for class drama

The purpose of the drama is to emphasize how the tradition of transmitting the Word of God is done from person-to-person. The lighted candle represents Jesus as the "light of the world." The drama is performed in the second half of the second hour of class.

The presenter asks the class for 12 volunteers, who meet in away from the class. The roles - played by men and women -- are:

Jesus - 1 person

Apostles - 3

Creed - 1

Bible - 1

Bishops - 4 (carry skulls to represent the "living faith of the dead")

Devil - 1

Reader for *Ephesians 3.14-21*

The narrator begins by calling Jesus, holding a lighted candle (or paschal candle), to come forward and face the class. (In the meantime, the devil meanders through the classroom in quiet fashion and pokes people.)

Narrator:

If we want to know what God looks like, we turn to Jesus. God takes the initiative to reveal the divine Self by breaking into human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is filled with compassion and mercy; and so is God. Jesus calls all into an intimate communion with God who lives in the hearts of one another and makes all of us brothers and sisters. For that reason, there is one table when we break bread at the Eucharist and we remember the hope beyond the sufferings of the Cross. The message and teaching of Jesus is light for our paths and gives meaning to our lives. He passes this light to the world through his apostles.

(The Apostles enter and Jesus gives them the lit candle and exits the scene.)

Narrator:

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, passed on the new commandment of love to the disciples. His followers have the mandate to preach this new message of life. The apostles spread the word far and wide by establishing communities who commemorate the belief that "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

The communities in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece started to grow in numbers. The testimony of the apostles was passed on to the next generation. Many varied opinions about who Jesus was started to abound causing confusion in the minds and hearts of many. Some asked: Was Jesus more human than God or more God than human?

(Those with the Creed and Bible enter the scene. The apostles hand the candle to this group.)

Narrator:

Order and a belief system was put in place by profession of the rule of faith, called the Apostles' Creed. Belief in the details of the creed identified the person as a member of the Christian community. Later, in the year 393, at the bishops' conference in Hippo, a region in North Africa, the bible was composed in the form we find it today. The Christian community now has its Creed and its sacred writings that guarantee the core message of Jesus which is passed on to his first disciples.

With the Creed and Bible, the elders of the communities, known as the bishops, have the responsibility to pass on the belief that Jesus is the light of the world and we are called to become his followers.

(The bishops, carrying the skulls, enter the scene and receive the candle. The creed and bible move off the stage.)

Narrator:

The bishops are entrusted with the mission to transmit the vision of Jesus and his gospel. They carry the skulls because our tradition is the "living faith of the dead," the faith we received from our ancestors, our parents and grandparents.

*The bishops are not above the Gospel, but its servant. When the bishops come together in conference, as in a council with the Pope, they discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in light of the signs of the times. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is in the long line of tradition of councils going back to the first council of Jerusalem in chapter 15 of the **Acts of the Apostles**.*

Because of our baptism, we have received the light of Christ. It is up to us to pass on the core teachings of Jesus to our children by what we do and, more importantly, by our example and what we love. As we know, this is not an easy task to pass on “the tradition.” That is why we have the little devil running around, tempting us and trying to put out the light of Christ. But we know by faith that there is no darkness that can extinguish the light of Christ.

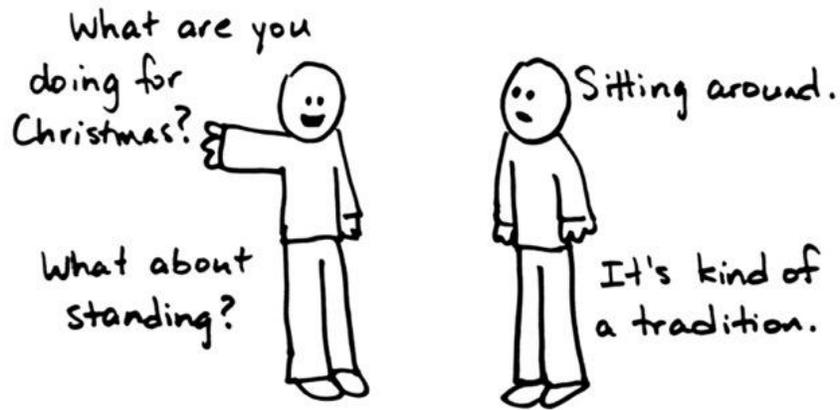
(The candle is passed around to all the participants in the classroom. Each one takes the candle and passes it on to another person.)

(Once the candle has been passed around, the narrator, or another person, concludes the drama by reading *Ephesians 3.14-21.*)

Resources: Scripture, Catechism, *Manual for the Catholic of Today*, Vatican II document *Dei Verbum*.

Vocabulary:

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| Tradition | Sense of the faithful (sensus fidei) |
| Mk. 7.13 | Episcopal succession |
| 1Cor. 11.23 | Rule of faith |
| Core message | Magisterium |
| Apostolic teaching | Church |
| Oral tradition | Florilegium |
| Written tradition (scriptures) | Era of the Fathers |
| Bible (393 CE); Council of Hippo | Traditionalism |
| Relation: scriptures/tradition | Content of tradition |
| Deposit of faith | Process of tradition |
| Transmission | Historical change |
| St. Irenaeus | Biblical interpretation: new methods |
| Dogma | Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) |
| Doctrine | |



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; the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty;
from thence He shall 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.