

Class 2: Introduction to the Sacred Scriptures

Objectives:

- Appreciate the bible as the Living Word of God
- Grasp the connection between Scripture and Tradition
- Track the historical creation of the canon of the bible
- Distinguish between biblical inspiration and interpretation
- Become aware of some modern methods of biblical scholarship
- Appreciate the role of the bible in our liturgy and faith life
- Have ability to navigate through the bible
- Pray the bible—Lectio Divina

Overview:

St. Jerome says “to know the sacred scriptures is to know Jesus Christ.” Unfortunately, many Catholic Christians do not know the scriptures of the bible. Catholics have a tendency to focus too much on ritual, doctrine, and dogma and forget the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus. It is easier to “believe” in Jesus, rather than to “follow” him. To follow Jesus requires knowing his message and teaching, which are found in the scriptures. Catholics are urged to acquire a new awareness of and understanding how to interpret the scriptures.

The scriptures are the foundation for Christian theology and the source and measure of authentic spirituality. The purpose of the class is to introduce the history, content, and practice of using the scriptures as the basis for prayer and the window through which theological reflection takes place. The student ought to have a familiarity with the origins of the bible, the major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) and the Christian Scriptures (NT), and the practice of *lectio divina* (meditating with the bible).

Resources:

- a. The Liturgical Press (www.litpress.org)
- b. “The Bible Today” (at www.litpress.org or 1-800-445-5899)
- c. NAB bible at www.usccb.org
- d. Pamphlet on the bible (Channing-Bete)
- e. All Vatican II documents at www.vatican.va
- f. CCC, #101-141, 2653.
- g. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.
- h. Introductions to The New American Bible or The New Jerusalem Bible, *La Biblia Latinoamericana*.
- i. S. Binz. *Introduction to the Bible*. Liturgical Press, 2007.
- j. John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008.

Part I 5 Points from *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation—Dei Verbum* (Vatican Council II, 1965).

1. Definition of scripture, the Sacred Scriptures are:

- The inspired word of God
- A revelation of the God of love (The scriptures are love letters from God to humanity).
- God’s love is especially made know in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ (life, death, resurrection = Paschal Mystery defined.)

2. Scripture contains:

- An invitation to an intimate relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and
- An invitation to join a community to celebrate and grow in this relationship of love together.
- An invitation to discipleship.

3. Purpose of Scripture:

- *For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13). Dei Verbum, no. 2, Documents of Vatican II.*
For it wants the whole world to hear the summons to salvation, so that through hearing it may believe, through belief it may hope, through hope it may come to love.
(Dei Verbum, no.1, Documents of Vatican II. St Augustine, DE Catechizandis rudibus, c. 4, 8:PL 40, 316).

4. Scripture and Tradition

She [the Church] has always regarded and continues to regard the scriptures, taken together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. (Dei Verbum, no.21, Documents of Vatican II).

Tradition is:

- What the apostles handed on that they received—by word or letter.
- What was handed on, what was transmitted, contains all we believe and that we need for holiness of life, and is handed down generation to generation. CHECK REFERENCE
- It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence (*no. 6*)
- Sacred tradition and Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church (*no.10*). (In every age, the “deposit” of faith requires ongoing interpretation and a development of new methods of evangelization – Bl. Pope John XXIII).

5. A Living Tradition

The tradition is called a *living tradition* because:

- Each generation lives out the saving word of God transmitted through Scripture and the tradition in the unique circumstances of their time.
- The church develops her understanding of the divine truths through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is an ongoing evolution in the Church’s understanding of the divine mysteries. The Church continues in every generation, to study and reflect on the lives of the People of God and spiritual realities “*until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.*”
- This living tradition is embodied in each generation through its “joys and hopes, its grief and anguish” (GS, 1). God is revealed through our lives, so that every person will, so to speak, write his/her own Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

What do think the following quotes mean?

~ Christianity is not a “religion of the book” because “Christianity is the religion of the ‘Word’ of God, a word which is ‘not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living.’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC#108*)

~ "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)

Part II 4 Points (cf. booklet, *The Bible and You*, South Deerfield, MA: Channing Bete, 2010 ed.)

6. Tracking the Historical Composition of the Canon of Bible The bible was written by many different authors at different times—from about 1,000 BCE to 100 CE.

- The Council of Hippo (393 CE) and subsequent councils acknowledged some writings to be the inspired word of God (Define Canon).
- Division of the Bible into the Hebrew Scriptures—the Old Testament— and the New Testament of Jesus Christ (see <http://goo.gl/kXDIj> from USCCB).
- Finding your way around the Bible: Contents, Index, Chapters and Verses (Practice looking up citations with the group).

7. Biblical Inspiration and Some Modern Methods of Biblical Scholarship (cf. *Dei Verbum*)

- The Old and the New Testament are recognized as sacred because they are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God is the ultimate author of scripture, written by men using their abilities and powers to compose scripture. They are also true authors.
- God speaks through scripture, so we should investigate “*what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their [human] words.*” #12
- To learn this meaning, we should pay attention to the literary forms.
Ask: What are “*the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer,*” #12
- We give “*serious attention ... to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out.*” #12

Some approaches to studying the Bible

There are several different methods of discovering the meaning of scripture that are used by biblical scholars, below are a few:

historical–critical method, tries to establish the date, context, and intention of each book;

hermeneutics or interpretation, an openness to the deeper meaning of texts which can be found in the living tradition of the church;

actualization, the use of older texts in new ways and the application of biblical texts to contemporary circumstances such as personal prayer, liturgy, pastoral ministry.

Connect scripture with real life situations: joy, sadness, thanksgiving, suffering...use psalms. Psalms were the “*devocionario*” that Jesus used.

Emphasize discipleship –not just believe in Jesus, but FOLLOW Jesus...need to know the stories, especially the Gospels.

Biblical Scholarship and Scientific Disciplines, e.g. An archeology journal called “The Bible Today.”

(Gerald O’Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J.,

A Concise Dictionary of Theology, Revised and Expanded. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2000. “Biblical Criticism” p. 26, “Hermeneutics” p. 103.)

“Everything in the Bible is true—but not necessarily fact”

- Example: the story of the tortoise and the hare.
- The Bible is the story of God’s loving presence and action in history. The Bible is God’s word, conveyed through a collection of books using various literary forms such as stories, histories, poetry.
- We can depend on the historical reality of the Bible—scholars can identify which Scriptures are intended as history and which do not relate to the facts of history.
The divine meaning within the Bible is communicated in various ways that to be studied and interpreted.
- If the Bible is understood in a literal way, then the meaning can be over looked or distorted. *The Catholic Church does NOT accept a literal interpretation of the scriptures.*

8. The Role of the Bible in our Liturgy

Roman Catholics most often encounter the words of scripture in the readings, or the “liturgy of the word,” during the Eucharist celebration.

- The Sunday readings follow a 3- year cycle in which the most central parts of the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament are proclaimed.
- The Word of God is in the proclamation, not in “the book.” We listen, not read, when the word of God is proclaimed in the liturgy.
- The role of the Bible in our Liturgy is to nourish the community in God’s word.

9. A Way to Pray the Bible

Lectio Divina is an ancient way to “move” through scripture readings in a way that totally engages our humanity and opens us to the presence of God through God’s word:

1. Hearing/listening to the word of God, 2. Meditating on what we have heard, 3. Prayer that allows us to dialogue with God and be changed by God’s word, 4. Finally, rest in God’s presence and embrace.

Discussion Question:

How do you understand the saying, “Everything in the Bible is true—but not necessarily fact”?

What should I do to learn more about the bible?

How can I pray with the bible as preparation for celebrating the Sunday liturgy?