

GOD'S REVELATION: THE WORLD AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

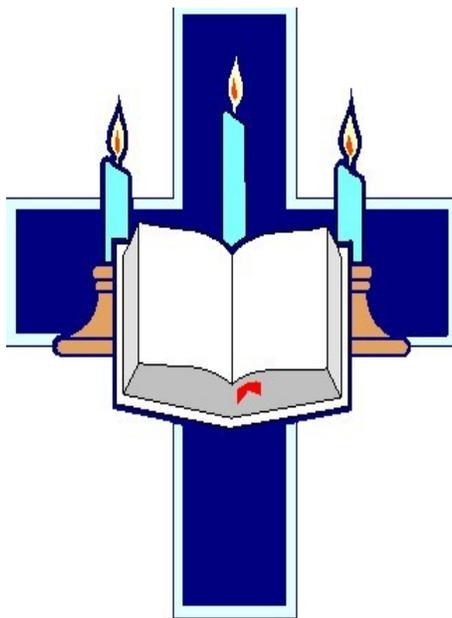
In the last flyer we considered how God reveals himself to us in the depths of our hearts. He speaks to us in our desires and calls us to seek his face. Thus our own heart, with its infinite longings, testifies to the existence of God and to the fact that we were made for communion with Him. God reveals Himself in other ways as well and we will consider two of them in this reflection.

The Created World.

We live in a world that manifests an order and a design. Things work together for a definite purpose and there is within the created world a harmony and a cycle. These qualities of the created world point to an intelligent and purposeful designer not to a random and chance coming together of mindless forces. Our world says clearly enough, "I was designed by someone who has intelligence, power, and purpose." This "someone" we call God. In this way creation is a revelation of the existence of God. And creation reveals not only that God exists but also something of his qualities and of his plan. Since the world is exquisite in its beauty and majestic in its grandeur then He who made it must be even more wondrous and glorious to behold. Since the world has order and purpose then He who made it must work according to a definite plan and have the patience and ability to bring about his will. The Scriptures themselves remind us of how creation points to God: *Ever since the creation of the world [God's] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made* (Rom 1:20). *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.* (Acts 14:16-17) Likewise the psalms speak of creation as a silent yet powerful witness of God's existence and glory: *The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are*

there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

So creation itself reveals God. And even before the Sacred Scriptures were given to the human race we could know of God's existence. Further, by observing the "law of nature" we could also learn something of the Law of God and base our lives upon the wisdom of God.



Sacred Scripture

Nevertheless, God saw it fit and necessary to give us additional help in finding our way to him. This was necessary for, even despite the glorious way creation reveals God, the human person has a mind that has been wounded by the effects of original sin. *Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God...and of the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator; yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and fruitful use of this inborn faculty...The human mind...is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered*

appetites which are the consequences of original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful. That is why man stands in need of being enlightened by God's revelation about...religious and moral truths...so that they can be known by all men with ease, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error (Catechism 37-38). Thus, in his great mercy God saw fit to reveal himself more directly through a chosen people who would record his interactions with them in a sacred and inspired collection of writings we call the Bible. Through this sacred and inspired source we come to know with great clarity the existence of God, his holy attributes and his wise and loving plan for us.

The Origin of the Bible

Yet the Bible did not merely fall from heaven in a completed form. There were stages in its composition. From the earliest origins of the human race God interacted with us. Surely He walked with Adam and Eve and described for them His loving plans. Even after sin He promised a redeemer (Gn 3:15) and began to prepare us for that redeemer. After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. In the midst of horrible sin God reached out to Noah and forged a covenant with him, drawing him through the flood. After the division of the world into nations and language groups at Babel (Gen 11) God chose one of those nations to bear his word to the world. In making a covenant with Abraham and his descendants God began a process whereby the nation of Israel would be called to bear His word to the world. He saved Israel by calling them out of slavery and into the promised land. He gave them his law and sent them prophets to admonish, instruct and remind them of his plan for them. All these interactions of God with his people were remembered and told from one generation to the next. In several stages and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit these revelations were placed in written form to be faithfully

handed on to succeeding generations. We call the collection of writings pertaining to God's interactions with Israel, the "Old Testament."

With the coming of the promised redeemer, Jesus, a new phase in revelation opened: *In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world....Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit...(Heb 1:1-2; 2:1-3).* Thus, once again, God's saving works and solemn teachings were attested to by witnesses (the apostles and evangelists) whose testimonies, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were written and collected in what we call the "New Testament."

The Bible and Church

Just as the Old Testament was entrusted by God to Israel, the New Testament was entrusted by God to the Church. It is because of the Church that these books were collected and acknowledged to be inspired. This is an important truth to acknowledge. The Bible as we have it today came to us from God but through the Church. We know what books belong to the Bible because the Church tells us. How do we know for example that there are four Gospels and not five, or three? Again, it required the authority of the Church to discern and then to officially declare which books were inspired by God and which were of merely human origin. This was done in the early centuries of the Church through the bishops and early Councils of the Church. This is what St. Augustine means when he wrote, *But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me* (Letter Against the Manichees, 5:6). In other words he would not know what the Gospels were so that he could come to faith had not God revealed what they were through the Church. In our Catholic tradition we are careful never to separate

the Scriptures from the Church through which God revealed them. Thus we read them in the context of the faith of the Church. *The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone...This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.* (Catechism 85-86).

This approach distinguishes the Catholic Church from the Protestant churches, most of which hold that every individual Christian should be able to interpret Scripture as he or she sees fit. Yet it remains true that Christians will many times disagree as to the exact meaning of certain passages. It is our Catholic manner to resolve these differences by appealing to the overall sacred deposit of faith given to us in the teachings of the Church. It is ultimately the role of the Bishops and the Pope, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to give such solemn teachings and interpretations regarding sacred scripture. (cf Gal 1:6; 2 Pet 3:15-18).

Teachings on Scripture

In a small flyer of this length it is impossible to say all that needs to be said regarding the Bible. The following teachings however need to be highlighted

God is the author of Sacred Scripture...*Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.* (Catechism # 105)

Inerrancy - *The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should*

be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures. (Catechism 107)

The Gospels are accurate accounts of Christ's life and teachings - *The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, "whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up...The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form; others they synthesized or explained...but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus* (Catechism 126)

Revelation is complete - *No new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries* (Catechism 66)

The centrality and reverence of Scripture - *Through the words of sacred Scripture God speaks...For this reason the Church has always venerated the scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body...Access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful. The Study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology...The Church forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful to...frequent reading of divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.* (Catechism 102-104; 131-133).