

- **Recommended Reading** - Suggestions for great reading materials.
- **Thoughtful Questions** - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

THE SACRED DEPOSIT OF FAITH

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"It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature." (CCC 51)

As we mentioned in an earlier issue, God created each of us to share in His life, His very nature. To prepare us and make us capable of responding to His call to share this life, God reveals Himself to us. He does this by deeds and words, which are bound up with each other and shed light on each other. (CCC 52,53) God has revealed himself to man gradually and by stages as described in our previous issue on the covenants. This was to prepare people for the culmination and the fullness of His Revelation in the person and mission of Jesus Christ, the Father's one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word. God's revelation is now complete, but "... it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries." (CCC 66)

The question now becomes: How do we come to know this revelation of God? How is it transmitted over the centuries? Paragraph 74 of the catechism tells us "Christ must be proclaimed to all nations and individuals, so that this revelation may reach to the ends of the earth." This leads us to ask: In what ways is Christ proclaimed and how do we know that what we are told is really the truth of Christ? As the catechism describes in paragraphs 75 thru 79, Christ commanded His apostles to preach the Gospel, which was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. They accomplished this mission in two ways. First of all by the spoken

word or orally, and secondly, by the written word. By these two methods, they handed on what they had received from Christ himself, from his way of life and works, and what they had also learned at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 76) In order to preserve this full and living Gospel and protect it from error, they then appointed

bishops as their successors and gave them their own position of teaching authority. This is called "apostolic succession" and it is to be preserved in a continuous line until the end of time through the Magisterium of the Church (the Pope united with the Bishops). The living transmission of the Gospel accomplished through this apostolic succession is termed "Sacred Tradition". This is the unchanging teaching of the Church and is distinct from "traditions" (with a small "t") which are practices or disciplines that can be changed or even removed. While this Sacred Tradition remains unchanged, the Church continues to develop and deepen her understanding of it over time as is true of all revelation. In our day we are blessed to have much of Sacred Tradition handed on to us in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Sacred Scripture, the revelation of God expressed in the written word, together with Sacred Tradition forms the "Deposit of Faith". The Magisterium of the Church has been given the responsibility by Jesus himself of handing on this Sacred Deposit and protecting it from error.

This understanding of the relationship between Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the

Magisterium is unique to the Catholic Church. It is often described as a three legged stool.



If one of the legs fails or is missing, the stool cannot stand. This is one of the reasons why we believe that the fullness of the Gospel and the means of salvation is to be found in the Catholic

Church. It is also one of the causes of separation between Catholics and our Protestant brothers and sisters who maintain Sacred Scripture as the sole authority. The denial of Sacred Tradition and the teaching authority of the Magisterium has resulted in much division among Christians and the formation of thousands of different denominations. Let us pray for the unity that will come through the acceptance of the fullness of the *Deposit of Faith* - Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, protected and interpreted by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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THE CHURCH SPEAKS – SACRED TRADITION

God, who "dwells in unapproachable light," wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son. By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity. (CCC 52)

"The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious Manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁸ 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. (CCC 66)

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive

Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history... (CCC 67)

"Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit." "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 it 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." (CCC 81)

"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. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the

name of Jesus Christ."⁴⁷ This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. (CCC 85)

"But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." (Dei Verbum II, St. Irenaeus)

Recommended Reading

Dei Verbum

"The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" from Vatican II

Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth

Pamphlet published by Catholic Answers, www.catholic.com

(this website is also a great resource for further information on any topic regarding the Catholic Faith)

SACRED SCRIPTURE SHEDS LIGHT ON SACRED TRADITION



"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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt 28:19,20)

"O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith."
(1 Tim 6:20,21)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

"But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth." (1 Tim 3:15)

"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

"For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God * that you have through the imposition of my hands." (2 Tim 2:6)

Thoughtful Questions

Do you recognize God's revelation to you through scripture and the teachings of the Church?

Even though you may find it difficult to understand certain teachings of the Church, do you give assent to those teachings and pray for a deeper understanding?

As you grow in your faith, do you seek to develop and deepen your knowledge of God's revelation in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition?