

The church passes on divine revelation



why do we
need the
Church?

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Reflections based on articles 74–100 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

How we know

God, according to the First Letter to Timothy,
“desires everyone to be saved
and to come to the knowledge of the truth”
(chapter 2, verse 4).

And here, the Constitution on Divine Revelation
from Vatican II
offers us a clear insight in article seven.

“God graciously arranged
that what he had once revealed
for the salvation of all peoples
should last for ever in its entirety
and be [passed on] to all generations.

“Therefore, Christ the Lord,
in whom the entire revelation of [God] is summed up...
commanded the apostles to preach it to everyone
as the source of all saving truth...”

Christ, it seems,
deeply desired that all people
everywhere and throughout all time,
should have access to the Spirit of God,
which is the Spirit of Divine Love:
that wonderful divine power
which he himself knew so well.

This tremendous power of love,
of forgiveness and self donation,
of generosity and joy,
is a great gift, indeed!

If preached to all,
could the world not come together in love
under the power of Divine Love?

And would not love, then, lead all people
everywhere and throughout all time,
to live as children of Love:

in peace,
justice,
and community?

This is no mere dream;
it is the desire of Christ for us!

*The
Church
passes on to us
all that she
believes.*

How the apostles preached

For their part,
the apostles commissioned for this work
by Christ himself,
handed on what they had heard and seen.

First, they spoke about it to everyone who would listen.
Whether they repeated what they had heard
from the very lips of Christ,
or simply spoke what the Spirit
prompted them in their hearts,
they did indeed speak.

And they wrote.
Whether they were apostles,
or those associated with the apostles,
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
they wrote down their stories.

These two sources:
the oral telling of the story
and the written record of that,
form a sure record
which helps us know what they knew.



And after the apostles, what then?

This story did not end
when those who knew Christ personally died.
Again, the Constitution on Divine Revelation
from Vatican II
provides clues about this in article seven.
“In order that the full and living Gospel
might always be preserved in the Church
the apostles left bishops as their successors,”
it says.

And in fact,
the very words of the apostles
echoing the teachings of Christ
would be preserved in this way,
everywhere and throughout all time.
Bishops would follow bishops,
teaching as the apostles did.

Thus the Word which is from the beginning,
the Word which is Christ,
the Word of God
is handed down through the centuries,
faithfully,
clearly,
and lovingly.

reflection

Share how the stories of your own family
and household are passed from one
generation to the next: oral storytelling
(at family gatherings or during quiet
talks) & written records (certificates,
photos, clippings and scrap books).
Recall in particular a story or ritual that is
significant in your family regarding faith.



Traditionally speaking

We give a name to the teaching of the Church
down through the centuries;
We call it "Tradition."
Tradition is distinct from Scripture,
but closely connected to it.
Tradition is the unfolding understanding
of what the Gospel demands of us
for each generation of the followers of Christ.
It is found in the church's liturgy,
her communal life,
and her doctrinal formulations.
But it is found especially in the people of the church,
believing together,
bound by the Holy Spirit,
and inviting all to join them.
And this Tradition,
all that was handed on to us through the apostles,
and then down through the centuries
by the bishops,
is not dead.



reflection

How do you experience
the vision and mission
of Jesus in your own life today?

What
Christ
gave his followers
is handed to us
through
the
Church.

Indeed, as the Constitution on Divine Revelation
takes pains to point out in article eight,
it "makes progress in the church,
with the help of the Holy Spirit.

There is a growth in insight
into the realities and word
that are being passed on..."

Hence we would even dare to say
that God's self-communication
made through his Word
in the Holy Spirit,
remains present and active
in the Church.

And this divine self communication,
this powerful presence of God,
is nothing less than grace.

We Catholics
honor both:
Tradition
and
Scripture.

One common source

We return to that Constitution on Revelation
once again, to article nine,
where we come to understand the relationship
between Scripture and Tradition.

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then,
are bound closely together,
and communicate one with the other.

Flowing from the same divine well-spring,
both of them merge, in a sense,
and move towards the same goal.”

And what is that goal?

It is to help all people
everywhere and throughout all time
come to know Christ.

Scripture is the word of God,
put down in writing
while Tradition helps hand on that word.

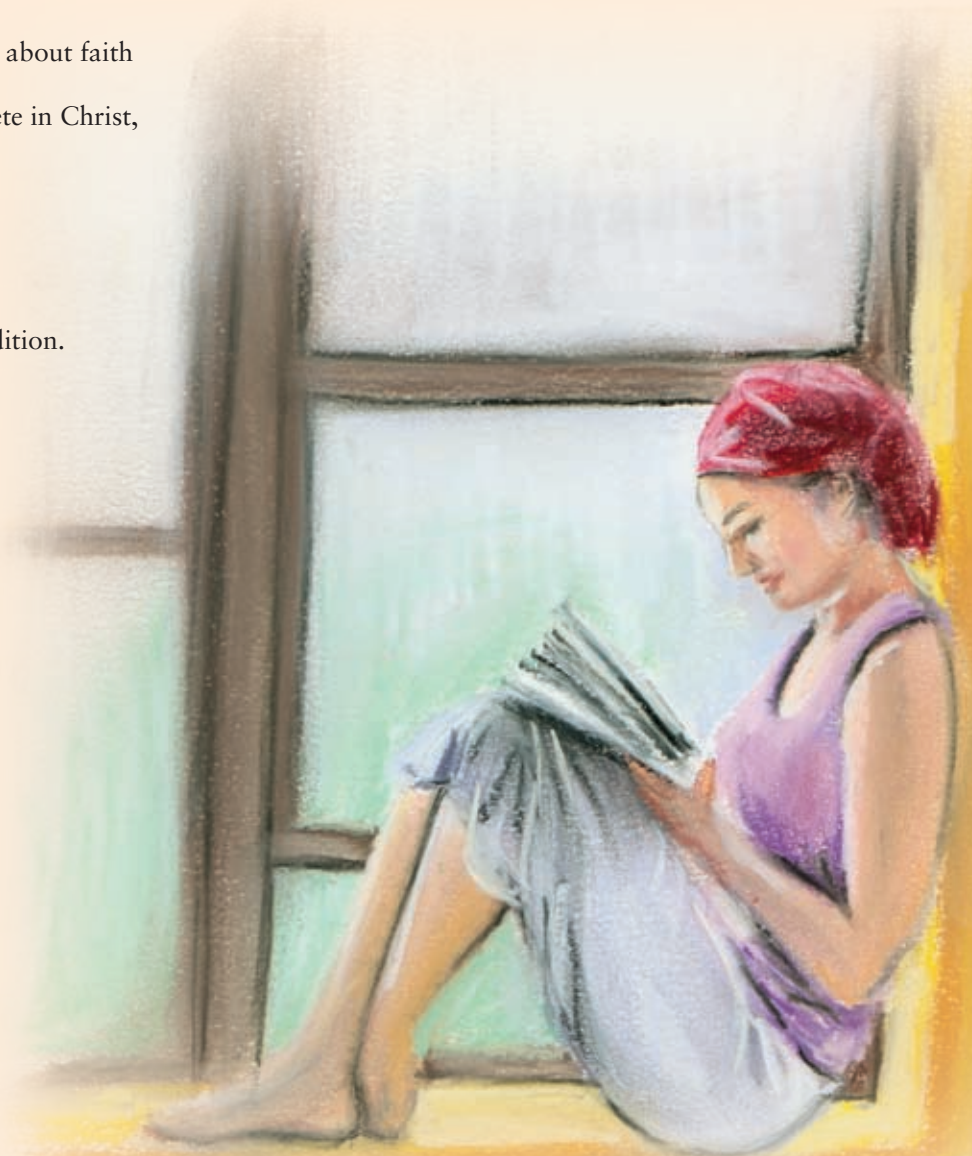
Hence, we Catholics believe
that we do not derive our certainty about faith
from Sacred Scripture alone.

For while revelation is certainly complete in Christ,
what that demands of us
is still being revealed.

God is still speaking,
and that voice is tested,
clarified,
and communicated
through on-going Tradition.

exercise

Make a list of the ways in which you can hear the Church speaking in today's society to continue the work of Christ. What message about the poor, the rejected, the immigrant or refugee, the wounded, the sick, the imprisoned, and the hurting does the Church teach? How in your parish is this message communicated and acted on?



The deposit of faith

A distinction is needed here
in order for us to understand this clearly.
When we speak of Tradition this way,
using a capital T,
we are referring to what has been known as
the deposit of faith.
The deposit of faith is the body of essential teachings
which we all believe
and which is found in Scripture and Tradition.
We call this the “Apostolic Tradition,”
and we distinguish it from “living tradition”
using a lower case t,
which is the collection of local traditions.
Local traditions might include
theological insights and approaches
liturgical and devotional practices and rituals
and even disciplinary styles or habits
which emerge locally
and may even receive wide acceptance.
These are merely local forms,
often reflecting a specific culture
period of history
or local need.
These local traditions
reflect the great Tradition
and help us live it more fully,
but these can be changed
or even abandoned
if they no longer serve a purpose.

This is why, as Vatican II was getting underway,
in the early 1960s,
Blessed Pope John XXIII
urged the bishops of the world
gathered there in Rome for the Council,
to carefully review
the life of the Church.
The great Tradition of the Church, he told them,
the heart of faith,
the core message of the Gospel,
does not change.
But the way in which we express that Tradition,
through local traditions and customs,
and through once meaningful language,
must change in every generation
in order for the Church to be effective
in reaching modern women and men
with the message of the Gospel.
Because this deposit of faith
is entrusted to the whole of the Church,
when we remain united as a community of faith,
when we break bread together,
and when we pray fervently,
a harmony between bishops and faithful
should always endure.
So the bishops-united-with-the-pope
keep clear how we understand God’s Word.
They are the teachers.
But they are also learners,
like all the rest of us.
They are not above the Gospel
but servants of the Gospel
and must always be faithful to that.
So their role as teacher is to guard the faith,
teach it lovingly,
and cling to the deposit of faith.
And the faithful people of the Church,
for their part,
are called to listen with full hearts
when the bishops speak.



reflection

Why is it important to have an understanding of the Church’s realization that in order to truly appreciate the teachings of the Church one must consider Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium in relationship to any particular issue? What could happen if one accepted only one of those sources to the neglect of the other two?

The faithful can trust that God's revelation,
the truth of the Gospel,
is communicated to them in this way.
We have a name for this official teaching office
of the church.
We call it the "Magisterium."
Sometimes the Magisterium defines dogmas
which are lights along the path of faith
and are a peek into the mystery of Christ.
This level of teaching is rare.
Furthermore, the Magisterium can never define a
dogma
that is not already believed
by the faithful.
All the faithful have a share and role
in understanding and handing on truth
because the Holy Spirit has anointed us all.
And when speaking as a whole body,
the church's sense of truth is always correct.
Hence, down through history,
aroused and sustained by the Spirit,
guided by the Magisterium,
and steeped in the Gospel,
we continue in faith,
certain in love.



Growth in understanding the faith

Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit,
our understanding of the heritage of faith
grows in the life of the Church.
When believers study their faith
ponder beliefs in their hearts,
and deepen their understanding,
we grow.
When believers immerse themselves in Scripture,
and allow themselves to be affected by it,
we grow.
When believers hear the Word preached,
knowing it emerges from the Church
as it has continued in time through the centuries,
we grow.
And this brings us to a conclusion here.
Once again, turning to the Constitution on Revelation,
we find the connections in article ten:

"It is clear therefore that,
in the supremely wise arrangement of God,
sacred Tradition,
Sacred Scripture
and the Magisterium of the Church
are so connected and associated
that one of them cannot stand without the others.
Working together, each in its own way,
under the action of the one Holy Spirit,
they all contribute effectively
to the salvation of souls."

topics included in this series

1. The Inborn Hunger for God
2. God Reveals a Loving Plan
3. **The Church Passes on Divine Revelation**
4. Scripture Is the Word of God
5. The Response to Revelation Is Faith
6. The One True God
7. God Is One in Three
8. God, the Creator
9. God Creates Everything Seen & Unseen
10. The Reality of Sin and Grace
11. You Are the Messiah!
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47. Ways to Pray & Obstacles to Prayer
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about the art



[Referring to those who believe the Church rejects them] *"But I must be like Christ. I open wide my arms to embrace them. I love them and I am their father. I am always ready to welcome them...all that the Gospel requires of us has not yet been understood."* Balducci, Ernesto, trans by Dorothy White, John *"The Transitional Pope,"* McGraw Hill, New York, 1964. P 31.



But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Luke 11:28.



"The Gospel was handed on...by those apostles and others associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing," Catechism #77.

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