

From the desk of Fr. Jim

The Catholic View of the Bible Part 3: Scripture and Tradition (cont'd)

One of the most extraordinary miracles of our faith is the Church. God desires that all people be saved. This is the mission of his truth, to draw all mankind to himself. (John 12:32; 16:17) We stand in awe as we come to more deeply realize the implications of the condescension of the Son of God, who stepped down from his heavenly throne and offered himself on the cross as victim for our sins.

Those who heard him speak, observed the miracles and witnessed his Resurrection, were at first baffled and then moved to the deepest devotion. Even at the Ascension when he rose bodily into heaven, they worshipped him. And in the truth about Jesus, in his gift of Baptism, his Body and Blood, the infusion of his grace into their heart and in their worship and obedience given to the Son of God, they were saved. We need to reflect a little more on this “process” of redemption.

One of the extraordinary scenes following the Resurrection took place at Emmaus. Jesus appeared to two unnamed disciples as they traveled to the village from Jerusalem. He somehow kept them from recognizing him and after a conversation on the road they pressed him to stay in the village for supper. As he broke the bread at the table he was revealed to them. He vanished from their sight and the disciples hurried back to Jerusalem with the news.

As Luke says:

“Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”
(Luke 24:35)

The appearance of Jesus is a convincing testimony to the truth. It not only reveals that Jesus is alive following the brutal death by crucifixion, it also proves that everything that the disciples heard from Jesus was the very word of God. They have heard and seen truth from its author.

Now we must move from Emmaus to beyond the event of the Ascension of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit. As Jesus empowers his disciples, he does so with the grace to save. The Church is endowed with the spirit so that it may carry the message and event of salvation to the ends of the earth:

“Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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 behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:18-20)

The truth that Jesus placed in the hands of the apostles is called the Apostolic Tradition. It is the saving truth of God in Christ Jesus:

In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore, Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see I Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts.
(Vatican II, Dei Verbum, 7)

There are two distinctly different forms of the transmission of God's revealed truth:

The first is the oral transmission wherein the Apostles handed on to others what they had received "whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit." (**Catechism, 76**)

The second is the written record from those witnesses, the Apostles and others who "under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation in writing." (**Catechism, 76**)

Actually, although these two distinct forms of the transmission of the Good News are in service to the salvation of humanity, they are forms of communication that are very common to us. The difference between this and other forms of passing on information is their relationship to their goal (salvation of the world) and their source (the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

Next time: Inspiration and Inerrancy