

## From the desk of Fr. Jim

### The Catholic View of the Bible Part 4: The Teaching Authority of the Church

Once again, any discussion of what the Bible is must include the statement that it has to do with the transmission of Word of God. It must also be understood that this “word” is also found in the Apostolic Tradition. The Apostles received God’s word through both the oral and written transmission of God’s truth. This “heritage of faith” is thus handed on to every generation. One of the most significant paragraphs of the Second Vatican Council is in the Document entitled “The Word of God” (“*Dei Verbum*”):

*Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. Both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. Sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone from which 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. (**Dei Verbum, 9**)*

The teaching authority of the Catholic Church is in service to the Holy Scripture and the application of God’s truth to our life. Anyone who opens the Bible or joins a Bible study group recognizes immediately that there is a problem, having to do with its interpretation. Even the translation of the Bible from its original languages creates opportunities for misunderstanding. Therefore, it is the role of the teaching authority of the Church to provide that interpretation.

*“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.” This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. (**Catechism, 85**)*

Now, we need to give some application of these teachings to the life of the everyday Christian. The main subject of the Bible is to transmit to us the meaning of our life and to reveal to us truths about God and our relationship with him. Of course, we find all sorts of things in the Bible, including descriptions of worship, lists of moral teachings, the structure of church life and government. These are set in the context of the life and times of the people who first received them. In some cases their lives were very similar to ours. They had the same fears and needs, even the same confusions and questions about the world around them. In

other cases, their lives were quite different. They had a different set of conclusions about the physical world, the stars, and the shape of the earth. They understood that illness had a different origin than our medical science teaches. And from the Old Testament to the New there is a dramatic difference in understanding. For example, Holy wars were common in the Old Testament. Jesus' teaching in the New Testament absolutely rejects the use of violence as a solution to our problems.

This is only a smattering to the problems that one encounters in reading the Bible. The point that we need to make here is simply that an interpretation is needed. Someone with a God-given authority has got to help us. Otherwise we have to resort to some humanly invented claim of authority over the Bible. Who is to say that this preacher or that Biblical scholar has such an authority? It is for this reason that Jesus constructed his church the way he did. He did not want his children to be confused about the revelation of the truth about our redemption. He gave us a hierarchy that has the responsibility and authority for applying and interpreting the teachings of the Bible.

*“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19)*