

## From the desk of Fr. Jim

### The Catholic View of the Bible Part 5: An Inspired Book

The Catholic Church's teachings about the Bible are quite dramatic, especially when it comes to placing the Scriptures in high esteem. As we attempt to answer the question concerning the place of the Bible in our life, here is another good starting point from the Second Vatican Council (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, "Dei Verbum")

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are **sacred and canonical because 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. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the **books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.**

Therefore: *"all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text)

The important clarifications that come from these paragraphs are first of all that the Bible is both sacred and canonical, part of the body of truth that is used to establish the Church's understanding of our faith. The doctrines of the Catholic Church do not live in opposition to Scripture. Rather, they live in harmony with the sacred texts.

The appearance of these texts is a result of divine inspiration. This "process" of guiding a human author is in reality a mystery which we can only partially understand. We do know that it does not eliminate the cultural and historical setting of the writing.

Eternal truth is breathed through those influences and comes to us, living in another time and far away from the originating experience. Our world view is influenced by our time and we may sometimes find it difficult to discern the eternal truth because of those differences.

*“Since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.” (Dei Verbum, 12)*

While we have great need of the authoritative guidance of the Catholic Church in understanding and applying the Bible to our life, here are some points of consideration that the church provides us:

- (1) Read the Bible as a whole. Single lines of text may not adequately reflect a relationship to the unity, but it is the unity of the Scriptures, the single truth that we seek. The teachings, example and saving act of Jesus Christ is the center and unity of the Bible.
- (2) The living tradition of the Church is the context of our reading the Bible. Being aware of the faith expressed in the Tradition of the Church will ease our confusion about particular expressions that we may find in the Bible.
- (3) The truth of Christ is not in opposition with itself, therefore we must be attentive to the guidance of each expression of that truth. For example, the forgiveness that Jesus offers even his persecutors is a truth that informs and guides every part of the Bible. Jesus is the fulfillment of every other expression and aspect of God’s plan and where questions occur, we turn to him for answers.