

# The God Who Speaks: Scripture Study for Today's Catholic

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***"The God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him."***

– Pope Benedict XVI

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### Abbreviations

CCC= *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

DV = *Dei Verbum*

PF = *Porta Fidei*

VD= *Verbum Domini*

WOTL = *The Word of the Lord: 7 Essential Principles for Catholic Scripture Study*

\* Other abbreviations references in the outline will be noted at the first citation.

## **SESSION ONE: THE GOD WHO SPEAKS**

1. **"The God Who Speaks" – The urgency and necessity of Scripture study, as expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in several recent documents**
  - a. ***Porta Fidei* and "The Year of Faith"** (Apostolic Letter, *Moto Proprio* Data: "For the Indiction of the Year of Faith (2012-13)")
    - i. "That the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph' (2 *Thess* 3:1): May this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm, since only in him is there the certitude for looking to the future and the guarantee of an authentic and lasting love." (PF 15).
    - ii. "What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the Word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end." (PF 15)
  - b. ***Verbum Domini* and "The God Who Speaks"**
    - i. "There is no greater priority than this: to enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so that we might have life in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10)." (VD 3)
    - ii. "The proper human response to the God who speaks is faith." (VD 3)
    - iii. The word of God draws each of us into a conversation with the Lord: the God who speaks teaches us how to speak to him." (VD 25)
    - iv. "In this way our word to God becomes God's word, thus confirming the dialogical nature of all Christian revelation, and our whole existence becomes a dialogue with the God who speaks and listens, who calls us and gives direction to our lives. Here the word of God reveals that our entire life is under the divine call." (VD 24)

2. **Catholic Scripture Study for Everyone:** "This book is for *anyone* who has ever asked, 'What does a Catholic approach to Scripture study look like?'" (*WOTL*, 13, emphasis added).
- a. While many excellent resources for getting started in Catholic Scripture study exist, bringing them together for the average Catholic can be a formidable, time-consuming and expensive endeavor
  - b. *WOTL* is used in a graduate-level course for Catholic seminarians. Thus, the same approach used for training Catholic seminarians in Catholic Scripture study are now available for today's Catholic, i.e. beyond the seminary.
3. **Beyond "Believing:" Illustrating the need for a Catholic approach to Scripture:**
- a. The story of Dr. Smith's experience at the debate on the "authority of the Bible" - between John Dominic Crossan (Catholic) and N.T. Wright (Evangelical) - illustrates the need for such a book as *WOTL* today.
  - b. Crossan (i.e. Catholic scholar) does not adhere to the "authority" of Scripture - while N.T. Wright (a non-Catholic) does. Yet, this adherence does not address the greater need, i.e., for a truly principled approach. Being Catholic does not guarantee one is adhering to a truly Catholic approach:
    - i. Crossan is a very intelligent Catholic biblical scholar - *yet was definitely wrong* in many crucial doctrines (e.g., Resurrection of Christ).
    - ii. Meanwhile, on the one hand, Wright handily won the debate over Crossan and his wildly speculative (and heretical) approach. "Wright was right" in what he affirmed about the authority of the Bible, etc.
    - iii. On the other hand, "Wright was *not right enough*" in that his approach to Scripture was brilliant - but not rooted in the principles that stem from Sacred (i.e. Catholic) Tradition.
    - iv. The point becomes clear -- while a "believer" like Wright affirms *the inspiration and truth of Scripture* (hence its "authority"), his approach to the Bible - while far more robust and healthy compared to Crossan's - remains insufficient. Wright's "belief" does not go far enough to sustain the more difficult questions about the Bible. It is "good" as far as it goes - belief in that "God speaks" in Scripture. Yet, "belief" in itself does answer questions such as these:
      1. How did the early Christians determine the definitive canon of the inspired / authoritative books?
      2. Can we know with confidence if we are interpreting the Gospels as the Evangelists intended them to be interpreted?
  - c. Conclusion: Without Sacred Tradition (and the Church's canon), one is left with belief and opinions of others. Sacred Tradition *takes us beyond subjectivism and individualism and places us at the feet of Jesus, along with Peter and the Twelve.*
4. **Beyond the ABC's and Proof-texting:**
- a. A common - but insufficient - method of Bible study employed by a number of Christians today is known as "The A-B-C's of Bible Study." As one reads a passage, there are three tasks: (A) What is the **aim** of the passage (big picture)? (B) What is your **best** / favorite verse? (C) What **challenges** you in the passage? While this may be a place to begin for some, the principles offered by the Catholic Church carry us much, much deeper into the mysteries Christ in Sacred Scripture.

- b. Other Christians merely “grab” a verse and connect it (or attempt to connect it) to a belief. Without proper principles or guidelines, this can often lead to *disastrous* results. One formal name for such mishandling of Scripture is called “*eisegesis*” (reading into the text) or simply, proof-texting, i.e., fitting a Scripture to a pre-conceived view, or vice versa.
5. **Towards a truly Catholic approach ...** A legitimately Catholic approach to Scripture study must go – and indeed does go beyond such simplistic or reckless approaches to Scripture as above.
- a. Catholic Scripture study begins with prayerful gratitude to “*the God who speaks*” in and through His Word. Beginning with genuine confidence that God is indeed speaking to us in Scripture, we affirm *the inspiration and truth of Scripture* as our absolute and essential foundational principle -- and the beginning of our adventure in His word.
  - b. A Catholic approach to Scripture must account for the “Word made flesh” in the hearts and minds of the prophets and Apostles – human authors ... a Word revealed and *enfleshed* in human authors and human history.
  - c. As Catholics, we are grounded in the firm belief that there is one Word of God – in “*written*” and “*unwritten*” or oral form. The written is the Sacred Page of Holy Scripture – and the unwritten is that which we call Sacred Tradition, transmitted orally by the Apostles, and passed on to their successors. As such, the Church is tasked with a mission by her Lord: *proclaim and teach the truth until He comes again*. Thus, we never read the Scripture alone, but within the splendor of truth – Sacred Tradition – and with the guidance of the Magisterium.
  - d. Reading Scripture with Sacred Tradition, we can comprehend a “unity” in the whole of Scripture, recognizing God’s covenantal love for humanity in the OT and NT. We see that the NT lies hidden in the OT, and the OT is fully understood only in the light of the NT.
  - e. With the Church fathers ... to the Medieval scholars ... and right up to the modern age, we recognize that we stand on the shoulders of giants, and can apprehend different “senses” of Scripture and many layers of meaning, often “hidden” beneath the literal sense which is our starting point.
  - f. Far from “picking and choosing” a meaning(s) that suits us, we seek to exhibit wisdom, charity and prudence in our conclusions – weighing them with the whole of Scripture, the breadth of Tradition and St. Paul’s “rule of faith.”
  - g. Finally, we remember that our “study” begins and ends with prayer. We remember that our deepest task is to allow *the Scripture to interpret us*. In our homes, in the liturgy and in Christian community, in service and evangelization, in all that we think, speak and believe, *we are shaped continually by the Word of God*.

These are the firm convictions of Catholic Scripture study, rooted in the Apostles themselves. Together, they form a framework within which to live, move and have our being in Scripture. They can be summarized in the following “7 Principles” –

6. **The 7 Principles – In Summary Form**

- a. #1. God’s Word: Divine Words in Human Language
- b. #2. God’s Word is Revealed in History
- c. #3. God’s Word: Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture
- d. #4. God’s Word: Revealed in the Unity of the OT and NT

- e. #5. God's Word Has Meanings
- f. #6. God's Word Requires Sound & Balanced Analysis
- g. #7. God's Word is Life-giving and Active!

7. **(#1) God's Word: Divine Words in Human Language**

- a. Catholic Scripture study is governed by the firm belief that the Bible is the *inspired word of God, expressed in human language*.
- b. Thus, Scripture can be fully relied upon to teach us the truth about God and humanity in everything it says.
- c. Sacred Scripture was written under the inspiration of *the Holy Spirit* and, at the same time, was composed by *true authors, with all of their human capacities and limitations*.
- d. The thoughts and the words of Scripture belong both to God and to human beings in such a way that the whole Bible comes *simultaneously* from God – and from the inspired human authors.

8. **(#2) God's Word is Revealed in History**

- a. Catholic Scripture study rests upon '*the principle of enfleshment*.' Just as God's Living Word entered human history in the flesh (*John 1:14*), so too God's written Word entered history through its enfleshment in true human authors.
- b. In accordance with this, Catholic exegetes seek to discover the original meaning expressed by the biblical author in his ancient context.
- c. By the same token, the Bible can never be reduced to a merely historical word; God's supernatural involvement in human history is always affirmed in Catholic Scripture study.

9. **(#3) God's Word: Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture**

- a. Catholic Scripture study is grounded in the firm belief that there is one source of Divine revelation: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which '*flow from the same one divine wellspring*' and '*form one sacred deposit of the Word of God*' (*DV*, 10).
- b. It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings were to be included in the biblical canon - and it is above all *Sacred Tradition* that guides us to truly and properly understand the Word of God.
- c. In the end, it is the Church's Magisterium, the '*servant of the Word*', which provides the sure and authoritative interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

10. **(#4) God's Word: Revealed in the Unity of the OT and NT**

- a. Catholic Scripture study insists upon the *unity and coherence* of the whole canon of Scripture, both the Old and New Testament. This unifying dimension of God's Word is evident in many ways; a Catholic approach should be aware of three in particular: (1) *The Theme of Covenant*; (2) *Biblical Prophecy and Typology*; and (3) *Recapitulation in Christ*. In these and other ways, we affirm Augustine's conclusion: '*The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New*.'

11. **(#5) God's Word Has Meanings.**

- a. Catholic Scripture study affirms that God's Word is truly *rich in meaning*. Thus, a multiplicity of approaches can assist our search for the meaning of biblical texts.
- b. No one method of approach or particular sense of Scripture is adequate in itself to plumb the depths of Sacred Scripture.

- c. Diligent study and comparison of various interpretations – from ancient and medieval to modern and contemporary approaches can cast valuable light and yield fresh insights on biblical texts, provided one evaluates them within the Church's tradition and according to a hermeneutic of faith, and not suspicion.
12. **(#6) God's Word Requires Sound & Balanced Analysis.**
- a. Catholic Scripture study requires *sound and balanced analysis*.
  - b. God's Word merits vigorous study – which is marked not only by a curious intellect, but also by a robust Christian faith and genuine pastoral concern for the needs of God's people.
  - c. Three essential criteria from *Dei Verbum* (12) ensure a sound and balanced approach to the study of biblical texts:
    - i. *Attention to the content and unity of the entire Bible* (CCC #112)
    - ii. *Reading Scripture within the living Tradition of the Church* (CCC #113)
    - iii. *Adherence to the 'rule of faith'* (CCC #114)
13. **(#7) God's Word is Life-giving and Active!**
- a. Catholic Scripture study does not end when we finally arrive at the meaning of a text. *Now we must let the Scripture interpret us.*
  - b. Pope Benedict XVI, "All of our struggle and effort with the written Word leads back to its very source – to *'the God who speaks to us'* and who invites us to speak with Him." (VD, 24).
  - c. Pope Benedict XVI, "*The Word of the Lord* must be actualized in our lives, for it is powerfully capable of 'opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.'" (PF, 15).

## **SESSION TWO: COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE**

### **PART A: READING SCRIPTURE WITH THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

1. **Introduction:**
- a. Before turning to our questions, let's take a closer look at one of the 7 principles, namely Principle #4.
  - b. The purpose is threefold:
    - a. To get a more detailed look at one of the principles "in action."
    - b. To learn a "new" approach to Bible study which you can begin to employ as soon as you leave.
    - c. Finally, this method of Bible study involves understanding and applying some teaching from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (All you need is a Bible, a Catechism, and the *WOTL* book.)
  - c. P#4 restated: "Catholic Scripture study insists upon the *unity and coherence* of the whole canon of Scripture, both the Old and New Testament. This unifying dimension of God's Word is evident in many ways; a Catholic approach should be aware of three in particular: (1) *The Theme of Covenant*; (2) *Biblical Prophecy and Typology*; and (3) *Recapitulation in Christ*. In these and other ways, we

affirm Augustine's conclusion: *'The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.'* (WOTL, p. 109).

## 2. The Three 'R's' of Studying the Life of Christ in the Four Gospels

- a. **CCC #516** "Christ's whole earthly life—his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking—is **Revelation** of the Father. Jesus can say: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," and the Father can say: "*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*" Because our Lord became man in order to do his Father's will, even the least characteristics of his mysteries manifest "God's love ... among us."
- b. **CCC #517** "Christ's whole life is a mystery of **redemption**. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross, but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:
  - already *in his Incarnation* through which by becoming poor he enriches us with his poverty;
  - *in his hidden life* which by his submission atones for our disobedience;
  - *in his Word* which purifies its hearers;
  - *in his healings and exorcisms* by which 'he took our infirmities and bore our diseases';
  - and *in his Resurrection* by which he justifies us."
- c. **CCC # 518** "Christ's whole life is a mystery of **recapitulation**. All Jesus did, said, and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his original vocation: When Christ became incarnate and was made man, *he recapitulated in himself the long history of mankind and procured for us a 'short cut' to salvation, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God, we might recover in Christ Jesus*. For this reason Christ experienced all the stages of life, thereby giving communion with God to all men."

## 3. E.g. #1 "The Baptism of Jesus" (Matt. 3:13-17 / Mark 1:9-11 / Luke 3:21-22)

**Matt. 3:13-17** "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

### a. Revelation – of the Blessed Trinity

- i. **St. Augustine**, "Here then we have the Trinity presented in a clear way: the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Holy Spirit in the dove. This only needs to be barely mentioned, for it is so obvious for anyone to see. *Here the recognition of the Trinity is conveyed to us so plainly that it hardly leaves any room for doubt or hesitation.*" (Sermon 2.1–2)
- ii. **John Meier**: Five OT resonances that fortify the Trinitarian revelation in the Gospel. See: John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Vol. Two, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New Haven; London: Yale Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 106-16.)
  - 1) As for fulfillment of OT prophecies: *the heavenly voice proclaims Jesus to be God's Son* in the words of *Psa 2:7*, the words Yahweh addresses to the Davidic king on the day of his enthronement in Jerusalem.

- 2) The further designation of the Son as "*the beloved*" (*ho agapētos*) may be meant to conjure up the figure of Isaac, the "only beloved son" of Abraham (see: *Gen. 22:16*)
- 3) The final words of the heavenly voice, "in you I am well pleased," come from *Isa. 42:1*: "*Here is my servant ... with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit.*"
- 4) The setting of the bank of a river, the splitting open of the heavens, and a symbolic vision calling an individual to a prophetic ministry addressed to a sinful Israel all recall the inaugural vision of Ezekiel by the river Chebar in Babylon (*Ezekiel 1:1*).
- 5) The splitting open of the heavens that God might descend in an eschatological theophany may also carry overtones of *Isa 63:19*: "*Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!*"

**b. Redemption – Jesus' Redemptive Death, and the Anticipation of the Sacrament of Baptism**

- i. **CCC #536** "The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already '*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*' (*John 1:29*) Already he is anticipating the 'baptism' of his bloody death (*Mark 10:38*). Already he is coming to '*fulfill all righteousness,*' that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to '*rest on him.*' Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism '*the heavens were opened*'—*the heavens that Adam's sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation.*"
- ii. **Mark 10:38** "But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. *Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*'"
- iii. **Rom 6:1-11** "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. *The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.* So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."
- iv. **CCC #565** "From the beginning of his public life, at his baptism, Jesus is the "Servant," wholly consecrated to the redemptive work that he will accomplish by the "*baptism*" of his *Passion.*"

- v. **CCC # 1225** "In his Passover, Christ opened to all men *the fountain of Baptism*. He had already spoken of his Passion, which he was about to suffer in Jerusalem, *as a 'Baptism' with which he had to be baptized*. The blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life (*John 19:34*). From then on, it is possible *'to be born of water and the Spirit'* in order to enter the Kingdom of God. See where you are baptized, see where Baptism comes from, if not from the cross of Christ, from his death. There is the whole mystery: he died for you. In him you are redeemed, in him you are saved." (St. Ambrose, *De sacr.* 2, 2, 6)
- c. **Recapitulation - Creation and the New Israel**
  - i. *Recapitulates creation*: New creation, i.e. spirit hovering over the waters: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; *and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*" (*Gen.1:1-2*)
  - ii. *Recapitulates circumcision*. A pre-figurement of baptism (see: *Rom 2:29*)
  - iii. *Recapitulates crossing of Jordan* (See: *Josh 1:2, 12* [manna ceases])
- 4. **E.g. #2 The Wedding Feast at Cana** (*John 2:1-11*) "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, '*They have no wine.*' And Jesus said to her, '*O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*' His mother said to the servants, '*Do whatever he tells you.*' Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, '*Fill the jars with water.*' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, '*Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.*' So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, '*Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.*' This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him."
  - a. **Reading 'Cana' in Context: Who does John say Jesus is?**
    - a. **Jesus is the Eternal Logos and the only one who has "seen God" from all eternity, "face to face"**
      - 1. *John 1:1-3* "With God" (*pros ton theon*) – i.e. Towards God, seeing God "face to face."
      - 2. Pope Benedict XVI, "If we realize that this is an allusion to the beginning of the book of Genesis (cf. *Gen 1:1*), we find ourselves faced with *a beginning which is absolute* and which speaks to us of *the inner life of God*. The Johannine Prologue makes us realize that the Logos is truly eternal, and from eternity is himself God. *God was never without his Logos.*" (*VD*, 6)
    - b. **Jesus assumes human flesh and, in so doing, reveals the "glory" of the Father among His disciples**
      - 1. *John 1:14a* "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" (See: *Sir 24:8-11*)

2. *John* 1:14 b, c "...Full of grace and truth; *we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*"
3. *I John* 1:1-3 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, *which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands*, concerning the word of life—*the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it*, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

c. **Jesus is the New Moses – and the Only One Who From All Eternity Truly Reveals God**

1. *John* 1:17-18 "For the law was given through *Moses*; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*"
    - a. Law (e.g. Ten Commandments) → Moses
    - b. Grace and truth (Gospel) → Jesus
  2. *John* 1:21 // *Deut* 18:15-18; 34:10
  3. In the Incarnation, the apostle John and the other apostles "*beheld his glory.*" Thus, the one who gazes at *God the Father* now gazes at us:
  4. Pope Benedict XVI, "God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, *reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love.*" (VD, 6)
- d. **Conclusion:** Jesus is the eternal Son of God – the only onw who has seen God face to face. He, the Logos, has been "gazing at the Father from all eternity – and who now in His Incarnation, was "beheld" by the apostles (John, etc.) and thus "revealed" the glory of the face of God to Israel and the World.

5. **The Three 'R's' at Cana**

a. **Revelation – The Glory of the Son of God**

- a. Glory (*doxa*) in OT / NT
- b. *John* 2:11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.
- c. Jesus' sign confirms the '*we beheld his glory*' theme of *John* 1:1-18

b. **Redemption – The Mystery of Jesus' Resurrection and the Nuptial Bread**

- a. "Third day" – Resurrection (see: *Matt* 16:21)
- b. CCC #1335 "The sign of water turned into wine at Cana already announces *the Hour of Jesus' glorification*. It makes manifest the fulfillment of *the wedding feast in the Father's kingdom*, where the faithful will drink the new wine that has become the Blood of Christ."

- c. *Mark* 2:20 "The days will come, when *the bridegroom is taken away* from them, and then they will *fast* in that day."
- c. **Recapitulation – The New Moses and the New Sabbath**
  - a. New Moses - In Egypt, Moses turned the water of the Nile to blood ... at Cana, Jesus turns the water into wine ... which anticipates the shedding of his blood (*Exod* 4:9, 7:17)
  - b. New Sabbath: "Seventh" day: *John* 1:29, 35, 43 [=4 "days"] + 2:1 ["third day"] = seven days.

## PART B: QUESTIONS

- Q#1** Biblical inspiration: *How does it work* and what precisely is *the Catholic approach*?
- Q#2** The 'canon' of Scripture: (a) Who decided the canon of Scripture and on what basis? (b) When was the canon officially 'closed'? (c) Why do we have 'extra books' in our OT – and are they 'just as inspired' as the other books?
- Q#3** Bible translations: How do they work – and how can I select the best one?
- Q#4** Interpretation & commentaries: How is it that, a Catholic and a Protestant can read *the same bible verse* and yet end up with vastly different conclusions? Also - does the Church have an 'official commentary' on Scripture? (Can you recommend a good commentary?)
- Q#5** Ancient & modern: Which is better – ancient biblical interpretation - or modern biblical interpretation?
- Q#6** Biblical manuscripts: (a) Tell me a little about *biblical manuscripts* – how were they made, how many are there, and what is the oldest NT manuscript? (b) Are they 'inspired' and 'free from error'? If not, how can I trust the Bible?
- Q#7** The Dead Sea Scrolls: What are the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and what's their significance as it relates to the Bible? What can we as Catholics take away from this? [\* Addressed in Session Three.]
- Q#8** A truly Catholic approach: As a Catholic leader, I am asked to give talks / lead Bible studies occasionally. Given this, how can I 'know' that my conclusions or thoughts about a biblical passage are 'authentically Catholic'? [P#6]

### SESSION THREE: COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OT

**Q#1** The OT can be difficult, even perplexing in places. Can you recommend *a good place to begin / reading strategy*?

**Q#2** How is the OT organized? Are there natural divisions in the OT – and which is the most important?

**Q#3** How can we reconcile *the God of love* in the NT – with violent passages in the OT? (E.g., God asks His people to make war. *Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart?*)

**Q#4** Give me the 'big picture'— *what's the OT all about?* Is there one main idea or concept that unifies the OT?

**Q#5** Is Genesis a 'Myth'? (I believe that God created the world – but isn't the story of 'Adam & Eve' just that, a story or a kind of myth?)

**Q#6** I've heard a number of times, '*The NT lies hidden in the OT, and the OT is revealed in the NT.*' Can you explain this? How can I learn to read the Bible in such a way?

**Q#7** Can you describe Judaism in Jesus' day? What were the ancient Jewish people hoping for? Did they recognize Jesus for who he is?

### SESSION FOUR: COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NT

**Q#1** Who wrote the Four Gospels? What does the Catholic Church teach about the '*historical reliability*' of the Four Gospels?

- DV, 12 "Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, *whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven* (see *Acts* 1:1)."
- DV, 12. "The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches and preserving the form of proclamation *but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus*. For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who "*themselves from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word*" we might know "*the truth*" concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (see: *Luke* 1:2-4)."

**Q#2** What is the difference between the Four Gospels of the NT – and other so-called ‘*apocryphal gospels*’ that are in the news so much today (e.g. *Thomas, Judas*)?

**Q#3** What exactly was the Bible which Jesus would have read growing up? How was it different than ours?

**Q#4** Why do the Gospels omit so many years of Jesus’ life? What are we to make of the so-called ‘*hidden years*’ of his life?

**Q#5** Regarding the Passion narratives, I’ve heard there’s a discrepancy between John and the Synoptic Gospels regarding the ‘Last Supper’. What’s the story there? More generally, what are we to do with such *variances among the Gospels*?

**Q#6** The gospels record much about Jesus’ crucifixion on Good Friday –and His Resurrection on Easter Sunday. What was happening on ‘*Holy Saturday*’?

- **CCC # 635** “Christ went down into the depths of death so that “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” Jesus, “the Author of life,” by dying destroyed “him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.” Henceforth the risen Christ holds “the keys of Death and Hades,” so that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*”

Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began.... He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him—He who is both their God and the son of Eve.... “I am your God, who for your sake have become your son.... I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.” (Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday.)

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