

LESSON 3: THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 7	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Intermediate Level / Age 10	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Advanced Level / Age 13	:	Cover points 1 to 12

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we discussed how it is we can know that this world has an intelligent Creator and did not come to exist by accident. But has this Creator introduced Himself to mankind? In this session, we consider how this intelligent Creator has made it possible for us to know Him.

Current lesson:

1. In the Catholic faith, we believe that this Creator (God) has deposited knowledge about Himself in the Catholic Church. This knowledge is called the Word of God or the Deposit of Faith.
2. The Word of God has been handed down from one generation of believers to another as a precious jewel. The Church has guarded and transmitted this Deposit of Faith so that people of every generation might know God.
3. There are two important sources of the Deposit of Faith or the Word of God. They are Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Both components are equally important and come together to constitute the entire Word of God. Sacred Scripture contains the teachings of the faith handed down in written form, whereas Sacred Tradition contains teachings of the church handed down through oral means.

CCC 76: “In keeping with the Lord’s command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

- *orally* ‘by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves 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’;

- *in writing* ‘by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.’”

CCC 80: “‘Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.’ Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own ‘always, to the close of the age.’”

CCC 81: “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” “And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching.”

4. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition have been handed down since the time of the Apostles, from one generation of believers to another, and it is taken care of by the Sacred Magisterium. The Sacred Magisterium is the official teaching authority of the Church held by the Pope together with all the bishops around the world who are in communion with him. The Magisterium ensures that the teachings of the Church handed down from one generation to another are accurate.

CCC 85: “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.”

CCC 86: “Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”

5. Sacred Scripture is the Bible, that is, the Word of God transmitted to us in written form. Comprising many books written over many centuries by many different authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Bible communicates to us how mankind has fallen and is in need of divine help, and how God has planned to save us from our predicament.

CCC 104: “In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, ‘but as what it really is, the word of God’. ‘In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.”

CCC 106: “God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. ‘To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.”

6. The Catholic Bible contains 46 books in the Old Testament (books written before the coming of Jesus Christ, all of which anticipate His coming) and 27 books in the New Testament (books written after the coming of Jesus Christ)(CCC 120). The Old Testament is originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, whereas the New Testament is originally written in Greek. However, seven of the Old Testament books were also originally written in Greek, and they are called “deuterocanonical” books (meaning “belonging to the second canon”). The Bible has since been translated into hundreds of different languages so that people from different cultures can know about God.



CCC 133: The Church “forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

7. Sacred Tradition refers to those teachings and practices communicated by Jesus and His Apostles not in written but in others forms. These other forms of communication could be some instituted prayers, art, actions, teachings of Church Councils, Creeds, etc.

CCC 82: “As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”

CCC 83: “The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus’ teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. the first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition.”

8. Your catechetical journey is about being gradually initiated into the Deposit of Faith so that your Catholic faith becomes not just intellectual knowledge, but also, a way of life.
9. The Catholic life requires for us to continually deepen ourselves in the faith of the Church. But even on matters we do not yet understand, we are called upon to embrace these matters in faith first, and then seek to understand that which we have yet to understand. This requires for us to deny ourselves of the right of private judgement.
10. Along the way, you may meet non-Christian friends who doubt the integrity of the Christian Bible, since it has been copied again and again, and some people believe that there have been major errors in the copying. Although the Bible has been copied millions of times, we have many archaeological evidences today (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the various Codexes) that our copies today remain faithful to the earliest copies that we have. Textual differences are so minor that they do not alter the meaning of the texts.
11. You may also meet Protestant friends who have doubts about the Catholic Bible because it seems to have more books than the Protestant Bible. As history shows, the Protestants had discarded some books that their founders had disagreed with in the 16th century despite the fact that the Church had always upheld the integrity of those books for 1,500 years prior to the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, had discarded all seven deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament. In addition to that, he also discarded the New Testament books of James, Hebrews, Revelation, and Jude in his German translation of the Bible. However, someone inserted those New Testament books back later on (for reasons we do not know). This is why the Protestant Bible today has no deuterocanonical books in the Old Testament but it has the same number of New Testament books as the Catholic Bible.

12. There are also non-Catholic Christians who disagree that Sacred Tradition should be considered as being a part of the Word of God, and who teach that we should believe in Scripture alone. But this notion is not supported by the Bible itself. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, St Paul instructs Timothy to “keep the *traditions* that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.” In 1 Corinthians 11:2, St Paul commends the Corinthian Christians for “maintaining the *traditions* exactly as I passed them on to you.”



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