

"Vatican II and the Year of Faith, Part 3: Scripture in the Life of Faith."

The Second Vatican Council draws a striking comparison between Sacred Scripture and the Holy Eucharist. In the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* we read:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body.

This comparison suggests that Scripture is essential to the life of the Christian faithful, and that just as we practice a Eucharistic faith, we should also cultivate a rich and devotional relationship with the Sacred Text. In this ongoing series on Vatican II and the Year of Faith, we are exploring the sources of our faith through the lens of the Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This week, we want to examine this role of Scripture in the life of faith.

The passage cited above emphasizes two truths about Sacred Scripture: Scripture is divine, and Scripture is liturgical. The Church venerates Sacred Scripture even as she adores the Eucharist. In liturgy, the Church offers the words of Christ in Scripture along with the sacramental presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Why do we say that Scripture is divine? Is it just because Scripture causes us to think about divine things, or that it was composed for religious purposes? No. We say that the Scriptures are divine because they were "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." (*Dei Verbum*, 11)

The Church does not deny that God made use of human instruments in the composition of the Scriptures. They are written in human language, and make use of the literary forms and conventions of their time. But this human element does nothing to devalue their truth or reliability. On the contrary, the Council stated:

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. (*Dei Verbum*, 11)

What do we mean when we say that Scripture is liturgical? Does this mean that we should not bother to read Scripture outside the Mass? Not at all. When we say that Scripture is a liturgical book we are saying that it is a book ordered to the public worship, teaching, and instruction of the Church. It is principally in the liturgy that the Church is "to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God." (*Dei Verbum*, 23)

When we say that Scripture is liturgical, we point to a key difference between how Catholics and some non-Catholics view the Bible. The Bible is not a textbook of Catholic doctrine or theology. Nor is it a kind of political document, like a constitution, for the government of the Church. The Church has a way to answer these kinds of questions (namely, her Sacred Magisterium), but it

does not involve assigning Scripture a role Christ never intended. Unfortunately, many non-Catholics do view the Bible in these ways, and this has led to centuries of division and conflict within the non-Catholic world. They have tried to force the Bible to serve a role it was not written to serve.

If Scripture is a liturgical book, how should we approach it as individuals? Here, the Council's analogy between Scripture and Eucharist suggests an answer. Our Holy Father Benedict XVI and his Blessed predecessor John Paul II both stressed the importance of Eucharistic adoration as a devotional practice that prepares one for proper reception of Holy Communion. The Church has long advocated something analogous in one's approach to Scripture: *Lectio Divina*.

The Catechism mentions *lectio divina* when discussing the daily prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours:

The reading from the Word of God at each Hour . . . and readings from the Fathers and spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveal more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms, and prepare for silent prayer: the lectio divina, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration. (CCC, 1177)

The Second Vatican Council gives us an inspiring interpretation of our relationship to Sacred Scripture. In our reading and listening, we encounter the very words of God. These are to nourish us, enlighten our minds, strengthen our wills, and set our hearts on fire with the love of God. In all of this, we are prepared for our liturgical celebration, and for the source and summit of our Christian faith: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.