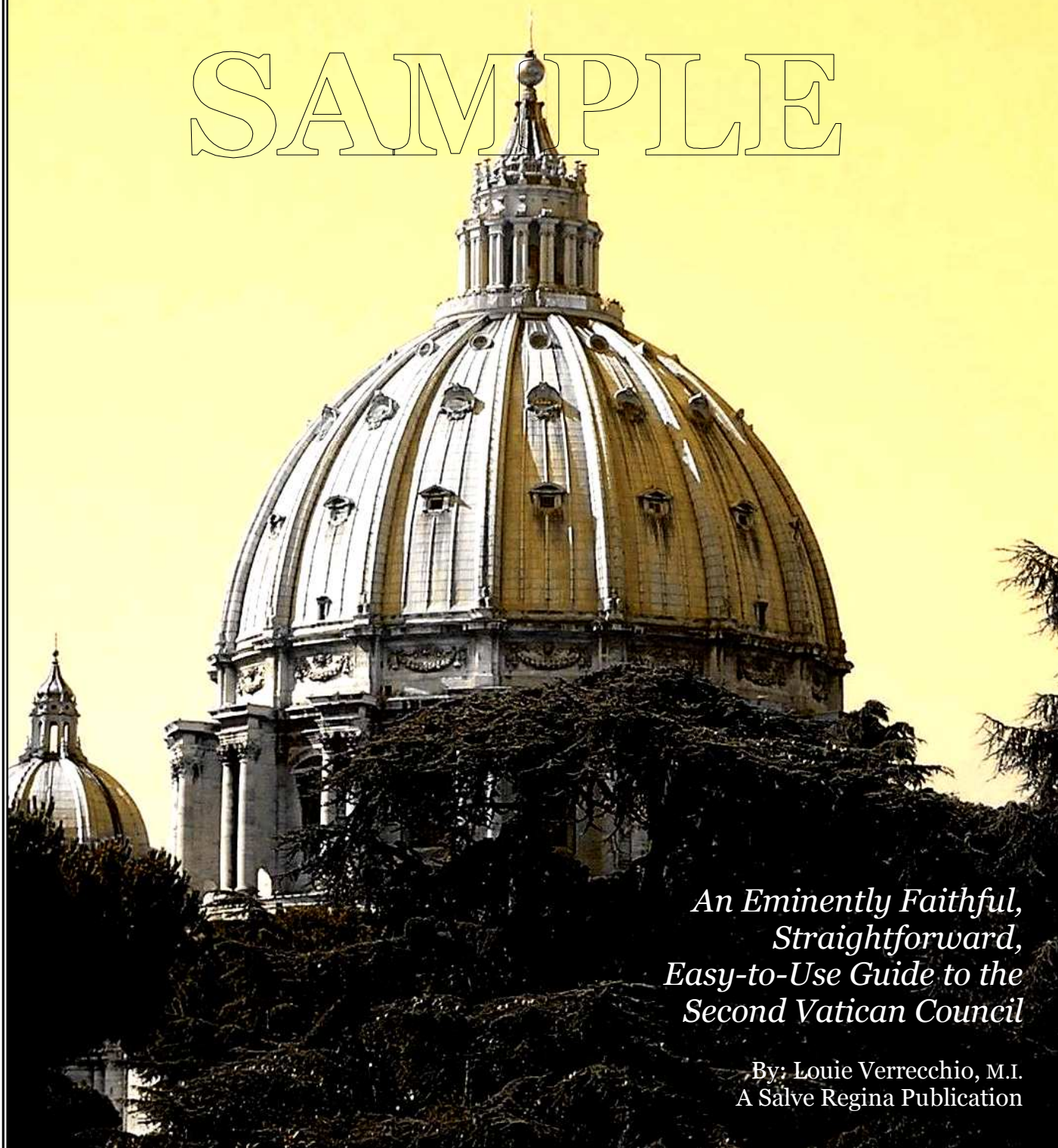


- PART ONE -
Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II

Opening Address of Pope John XXIII ♦ Dei Verbum

SAMPLE



*An Eminently Faithful,
Straightforward,
Easy-to-Use Guide to the
Second Vatican Council*

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Lesson 4 – *Dei Verbum* [SAMPLE LESSON taken from PART ONE]

Introduction

We continue our exploration of *Dei Verbum* in this lesson by taking a closer look at Sacred Scripture - its origins, its place in Divine Revelation, and its right interpretation. We'll also delve into sacred Tradition, which *together* with Scripture is God's word.

In so doing, we will discover the ways in which the Church instructs and guides the faithful in the profitable exploration of Divine Revelation; how we should go about peeling away the layers of meaning found in Sacred Scripture to uncover the living treasure within; and how God has provided His people with the sure gift of right interpretation and dependable teaching through sacred Tradition and the Spirit-protected Magisterium.

The Canon of Scripture

The English word “canon” as used in the word “canonical” is derived from the Greek *kanon*, which means “a carpenter’s rule, or that which measures and determines a standard.” One will notice that the words of Scripture itself provide us with no definitive standard as to which books make up the canon or “table of contents,” i.e. Scripture does not provide believers with a list of books that can be relied upon as the word of God. This is true as it relates to both the New and the Old Testaments.

So how did the canon of Scripture come to be known and relied upon as the infallible word of God? In short, the canon of Scripture came to be known by way of sacred Tradition confirmed by the teaching authority of the Church.

Sacred Tradition and the Canon

The early Church, of course, did not have a collection of books that were known as the New Testament. The preaching of the good news that began on Pentecost was an exercise of sacred Tradition, also known as the “oral tradition,” that drew upon the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of Christ as passed along and explained by “word of mouth” (2 Thes. 2:15). Only after the passage of decades were certain of those teachings - preserved, conveyed, and illuminated through this sacred Tradition - commended to writing.

Yet not only were the books that we now venerate as Sacred Scripture circulated through the early Church, indeed many other writings, even some of Apostolic origin, were revered as reliable guides in the formation of faith as well (e.g. the *Didache*). Only over time through a process of development in the Church, aided by “the help of the Holy Spirit,” (DV8) did certain of these writings come to be recognized and accepted as divinely inspired. Highlighting the important role of sacred Tradition in the process of discerning the divine origin of those writings which make up the canon of Scripture, it is worth noting that for centuries uniformity did not exist as various books in various places enjoyed a pride of place in the liturgy.

Indeed there existed a degree of uncertainty in the early Church as the divinely inspired validity of certain texts was discerned and debated along that path down which “the Spirit of truth

guides the Church into all truth” (John 16:13). In some places, for instance, the Book of Revelation was not accepted as Scripture and therefore was not widely read, while in others it did enjoy that veneration reserved for the inspired word.

The Council of Loadicea (a local council held around the year 360) did not include Revelation in the list of books considered to be the canon, whereas Athanasius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, did accept it as canonical, as expressed in his writing in the year 367. Evidence of such a growth in understanding is not a matter of scandal for Catholics; it is to be expected as sacred Tradition develops in the Church as it does even now (DV8).

Now that we have a sense for the way in which the Spirit guided the Church into recognizing the divine origin of certain writings, one must reasonably wonder how we moved from debate and discernment to the absolute certainty we enjoy today. The answer? The teaching authority (Magisterium) of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Teaching Authority of the Church and the Canon

In the early centuries of the Church, certain local councils; Rome (382 A.D.), Hippo (393 A.D.), Carthage (397 A.D.), and a later gathering at Carthage (419 A.D.) proclaimed the canon of Scripture as we know it today. Although the aforementioned councils were regional and not ecumenical, a definitive picture of Sacred Scripture began to emerge from them, as the canon they produced is precisely the same as that which was confirmed by the ecumenical council at Trent.

As we noted in Lesson 2, the ecumenical councils of the Church were often assembled in response to a particular heresy or the need for a definitive proclamation of sure truth in response to error and confusion. Such was the case concerning the Council of Trent (1545-1563 A.D.) and its treatment of the canon of Scripture in the face of Protestant attempts to alter the centuries-old understanding of the canon as accepted throughout the universal Church. Thus was infallibly defined and confirmed, once and for all, the complete canon of Scripture that came to be recognized by sacred Tradition under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

WDJRD – What did Jesus really do?

It is not altogether uncommon these days to encounter a Catholic theologian, writer or even a priest who casts doubt on the historical character of the Gospel narratives. Indeed, some have even gone so far as to claim that the Virgin Birth and the institution of the Eucharist as described in the Gospels are “dubious” and “nuanced” history!

As we will discover in this lesson, not all passages of Sacred Scripture are meant to be read as historical “blow-by-blow” accounts. Even so; the Council Fathers leave no room for ambiguity in the matter of Church teaching concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels’ description of Jesus’ words and deeds.

This naturally raises some questions concerning the reliability of those who imply otherwise by planting the seeds of doubt concerning the historicity of the Gospels.

So, if a theologian or writer is “Catholic,” does this mean that his or her work is doctrinally reliable? What about a priest?

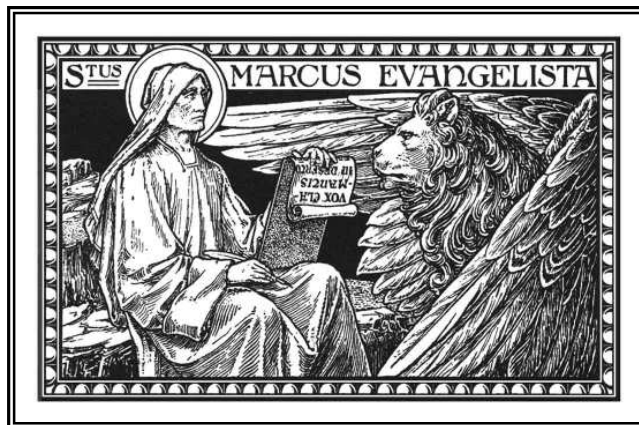
Anyone – clergy or otherwise - who blatantly undermines the historicity of the Gospels is clearly speaking outside of the Spirit protected judgment of the Church and is therefore speaking outside of the confines of reliability in the matter.

Now, does this mean that such a person can never produce meaningful work? Of course not, but what it does indicate is that *all* theological works must be scrutinized for conformity to the mind of the Church by those who wish to remain in the light of Church teaching.

Catholics are truly blessed in that they may rely upon the judgment of Holy Mother Church in matters of faith and morals. The burden, as always, is upon each of us as individuals in deciding whether or not we are willing to make the effort to measure the ideas we encounter against the teachings of the Church. As *Dei Verbum* makes clear, reliance upon the Church in such matters is actually reliance upon the Holy Spirit who leads Her into all truth.

Some works (like *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II*) bear the *Imprimatur* of a Bishop, the *Imprimi Potest* of a religious superior, (both meaning “let it be printed”) or the *Nihil Obstat* of a censor, (meaning “nothing stands in the way”). Each one of these designations indicate that nothing in the writing is contrary to the doctrine of the faith, but they stop short of endorsing the opinions expressed in the work. Though all three “endorsements” offer the reader a degree of assurance, it’s important to know that such stamps of authenticity do not elevate any work to the level of the Church documents; encyclicals, apostolic letters, etc...

NOTE: Our examination of *Dei Verbum* will conclude in Lesson 4 in which we will address the remainder of the document (articles 14-26) which follows. * For continuity, review articles 1-13, and remember to prepare to enter the Council document through prayer.



*** The official English language version of each Council document addressed in *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II* is reprinted therein by permission of the Holy See. The documents are broken down into segments for each individual lesson making it easy for participants to navigate its text. For the sake of brevity, the Council documents are not reproduced in the SAMPLE LESSONS.**

Study Questions

NOTE: Following each question, when applicable, a number will appear in brackets that corresponds to relevant articles in the Council document. This is intended to serve only as a guide, as additional insights may be found elsewhere as well.

1. In what ways has God revealed Himself to you in created reality?
2. Read CCC 115-119. What are the four senses of Scripture? Try your best to answer in your own words as much as possible.
3. Read Exodus 17:8-14 and see if you can identify each of the four senses of Scripture in this passage as described in the Catechism. [NOTE: If you find this exercise difficult, do not be discouraged! It takes time and prayerful practice. Revisit CCC 115-119 often, and work to apply what it teaches every time you read Scripture. In time old passages will speak to you in new and exciting ways through the four senses described.]



4. Does every passage of Sacred Scripture have a “literal sense?” Is it possible for Scripture to have a literal sense, and yet not be historical or scientific?

5. St. Augustine said that the New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is made manifest in the New. What did he mean by this? [14, 15]

6. Who wrote the Gospels? Why do the Gospels enjoy a “special preeminence” among the books of Sacred Scripture? [18]

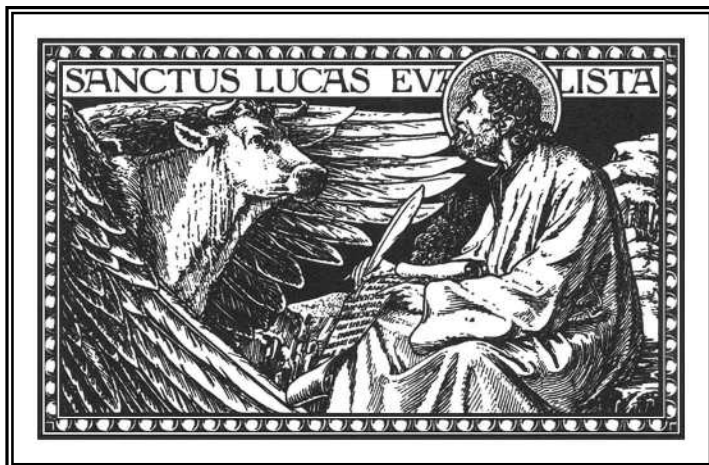
7. What does the “firm, absolute, and constantly held” teaching of the Church affirm concerning the historical character of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life? [19]



8. In the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Likewise, in Communion services and in calls to the homebound, the Word is proclaimed along with the invitation to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Why do you suppose proclamation of the Word and the Eucharist are joined in such a way in the work of the Church? [21]

9. The concluding articles of *Dei Verbum*, numbers 23-26, contain a number of directives intended to aid in the efficacious exploration of Sacred Scripture's vast riches. List as many of them as you can find. What other suggestions might you make to a fellow Catholic who is about to begin studying Sacred Scripture?

10. Read Matthew 28:18-20 and John 21:25. Catholics understand the word of God to be both that which was written – Scripture, and that which has been handed on – Tradition. (See DV 10.) How do the two passages from Matthew and John together make it clear that Scripture alone is not the fullness of God's word, and that treating it as such would not allow us to carry out His command?



Reflections

1. In DV 21 the Council Fathers say, “For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them.” What are your most favored ways of contemplating, studying and treasuring the gift of God’s revelation? [For your Action Plan, consider how you might go about making more quality time in your week for these activities, even if it requires changing some current habits and making some sacrifices.]
2. What is your favorite Scripture verse or story? Why? [For your Action Plan, consider how your favorite passage from the Bible might serve to move you to greater expressions of faith, hope and charity.]
3. In your reflections in Lesson 3, you were asked to consider those people in your life that you find particularly difficult to love. Take a moment now to consider the most unloved people in your community and in the society at large. Who are they? [For your Action Plan, consider how you might actively seek God’s grace to exhibit the love of Christ to them.]

Consulting the Catechism

119 "It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God."

But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me. – St. Augustine

Action Plan

Review your answers to the Reflection Questions and consider a goal for each one that will help you to make the transition from Reflection to Action. Commit to carrying out one action for each of your three reflections; this week, in the months ahead, and long term.

An action I can carry out this week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

An action I can carry out this month or next:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long term goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mass Intention

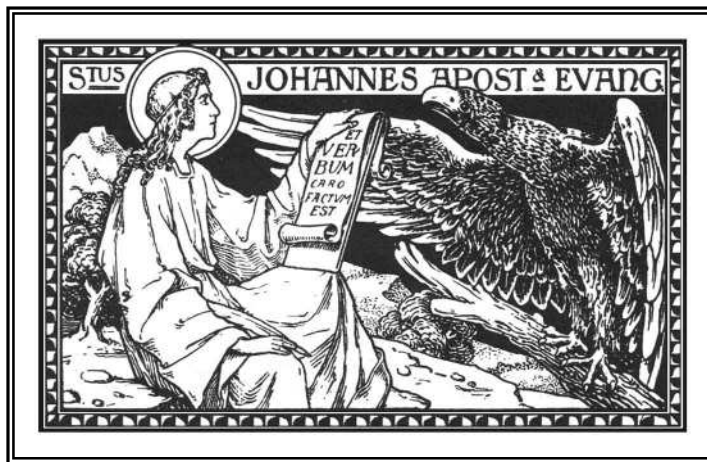


Suggested Responses

1. Answers will range from the awe inspiring ruggedness of the Grand Canyon, to the delicate beauty of a baby's fingers, yet every human being can speak of the ways in which the Creator's signature can be discerned in the world in which we live.
2. There are two primary senses of Scripture. The first is the literal sense. This is the *literal* message the sacred author wished to convey to his audience. All of the other senses are based upon the literal. The second primary sense is the spiritual sense which can be subdivided into three categories; the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical. The allegorical sense is reflected in those Scriptural passages that find their ultimate significance in the person of Christ. The moral sense is reflected in those passages that instruct us in how to live our lives in a just way. Lastly, the anagogical sense points to the eternal significance of things in heaven at the end of our lives or the end of time.
3. Answers will vary. In the literal sense, Exodus 17 describes a scene in which Israel engaged in battle with Amalek and his men at Rephidim as they made their way to the Promised Land. With God's help, as delivered through Moses and his rod, Israel prevailed. Historically, a great deal of enmity existed between the Amalekites and Israel, and they battled throughout much of Israel's history. The spiritual sense of the passage speaks of God's relationship with mankind, and His plan to free humankind from the bondage of sin. Allegorically, Moses is represented in this scene as a type of Christ; Amalek as an image of sin and death. Moses ascends the hill with rod in hand, purposefully going about the business of defeating Israel's greatest enemy. In this scene, he represents a poignant foreshadowing of Jesus, who would one day ascend Golgotha carrying His cross on His way to defeating mankind's greatest enemy, sin and death. The image of Moses on the hill with outstretched arms points to the scene on Calvary. Victory would be delivered to the Israelites through Moses as he rested upon a rock, a further sign of things to come. For one day Jesus would establish His Church, building it upon a rock, that through Her the good news of His victory would be delivered to men of every nation. In the moral sense, we are reminded of our need for reliance upon God for our strength and our refuge, for without Him we can do nothing. In the anagogical sense, this passage illustrates the manner of our own final victory over sin and death, won as it were for us by Jesus, so that we who stay faithful to Him may enter into the promised land of Heaven.
4. Every passage of Scripture has a literal sense, i.e., the sacred author's true intention. That is not to say that each passage of Scripture is to be taken literally, as in "historically." For instance, the sacred writer of Genesis described the creation of the world in a way that conveys, by way of the literal sense, an orderliness and purposefulness to God's manner of creating. Yet this literal sense is in no way dependant upon the historical or scientific accuracy of the account itself. Certain passages of Scripture are indeed historical, but we are not bound to assign historical accuracy to every passage, even as each has a literal sense. (As we will see in question 5, the Church has spoken concerning the reliable historical nature of the Gospel accounts.)
5. The Father's plan of salvation is foretold in the Old Testament. This plan finds its fulfillment in Christ as revealed in the New Testament. In this way, the New is hidden in the pages of the Old, and the Old is brought into the full light of Truth in the pages of the New.

6. The Gospels were written by the Apostles and by apostolic men. “Apostolic men” meaning men like Mark and Luke, who themselves were not Apostles, but rather followers and contemporaries of the Apostles. The Gospels enjoy preeminence because they are the principal witness to the things that Jesus said and did for our salvation.

7. The Council Father’s leave no room for ambiguity in the matter of Church teaching concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels’ description of Jesus’ words and deeds. As we discussed in question 2, not all passages of Scripture are meant to be taken as historical accounts. Even though She rarely gives definitive interpretation to specific passages of Scripture, the Church has spoken very clearly concerning the historicity of the Gospels.



8. The word of God in Sacred Scripture, and the Most Holy Eucharist, have always been venerated by the Church as sources of life, for both are the living Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word...” The Father revealed Himself in the Word, first in the shadows of the Hebrew Scriptures, then more perfectly revealed in the Person of Christ. “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” In the fullness of time, “the Word took flesh and dwelt among us.” *He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures.* After forty days the Risen Lord ascended into Heaven, but He did not leave of us orphans. The Word made flesh still dwells among us in the Most Holy Eucharist. Inasmuch as the Word of God in Scripture preceded and prepared the way for the Word made flesh, it stands to reason that the Church treats Sacred Scripture and Christ’s Body in Sacrament as inseparable in Her work of spreading the good news. Even today, the Word proclaimed prepares the way for us to receive the Word made flesh in the Eucharist.

9. In order to safely and profitably explore the riches of God’s word, the Church encourages us to: Study the Father’s of the Church; examine the sacred liturgies of both the East and the West; work with Catholic exegetes and other students of sacred theology; take care to study the sacred texts of approved translations of Scripture, all while following the mind of the Church. We may then proceed with confident reliance upon the guidance provided through the Church’s sacred teaching office. We began our efforts in the introduction to Lesson I by following the Council’s advice to turn to Mary for intercession and guidance, and we’ve been encouraged at the outset of each lesson to pray, asking for the Holy Spirit to reveal the light of Truth to us as we study.

Turning to the Lord in prayer through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and indeed all of the angels and Saints, is an indispensable step in preparing to explore God's word. So too is seeking an ever deepening union with Christ through the Sacraments, particularly the Most Holy Eucharist. For without Him, we can do nothing...

10. In the "great commission" recorded in Matthew 28, Jesus sent the Apostles forth to "make disciples, teaching them to observe *all* that I have commanded you." Yet St. John's gospel ends with an important caveat; the world itself could not contain all of the books that would be required in order to contain *all* that Jesus said and did. Therefore, one cannot truly carry out Jesus' command if one views Scripture as the sole source of God's word.



Summary

In this lesson we learned:

1. There are two primary senses of Scripture, the *literal* and the *spiritual*, which can be subdivided into three categories; the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical.
2. Every passage of Scripture has a literal sense, but that is not to say that each passage of Scripture is to be taken literally, as in "historically."
3. The Gospels enjoy preeminence because they are the principal witness to the things that Jesus said and did for our salvation.
4. The Council Father's reaffirmed Church teaching concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels' description of Jesus' words and deeds.
5. The word of God in Sacred Scripture, and the Most Holy Eucharist, are interconnected and have always been venerated by the Church as sources of life, for both are the living Word of God.