

FROM THE PASTOR...

January 23, 2022

One of my personal goals as pastor is to help people know that they can trust the testimony in the Gospels about Jesus. St. Luke begins his Gospel this week by saying many have compiled narratives about Jesus' words and deeds and that he, too, wants to report in an orderly way, based on eye-witness testimony. And he tells us why he's doing it: ***“So that you may know the certainty of the teachings you have received.”***

Too often Divine Revelation has been presented as legend, myth, or stories from the past. Some have done it because they were “enlightened” materialists who thought that anything supernatural recounted in the Bible must not have happened. My own boss before I entered the seminary loaned me a copy of the Thomas Jefferson Bible in which Jefferson edited out all of Jesus' miracles in the Gospels. You've probably heard the joke that Jesus could walk on water because He knew where the rocks were...that comes from this Enlightenment rationalism that says miracles don't happen because God either doesn't exist or doesn't intervene in the world.

There are those who think that modern scientific advancements are at odds with faith and God's revelation recounted through Sacred Scripture. Maybe there are some who just wonder if all the beautiful things we hear in the Gospel are just too good to be true. How might we respond to these various skeptical attitudes?

Faith can be confirmed by other personal testimonies that corroborate scripture. Our Lord didn't stop working miracles when He ascended into heaven. Consider miracles from the lives of saints, Marian apparitions at Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima etc... Or consider frightening accounts of demonic possession. I sometimes share a story about my own sister's vision of an angel which saved her life. Many of the wonders recounted in scripture still happen which confirm its testimony.

The Bible is also full of historical references that can be verified by other sources. While scripture has symbolic and mystical parts, our faith is a historical one. God has done things in time and space, and it's being told to us by eyewitness. This is especially true of the Gospels. The Church has always taught that the Gospels are historical and hand on what Jesus said and did. At the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* we hear:

Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, ... that the four Gospels...faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation...(see Acts 1:1). 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).

So, we can understand Scripture through personal experience, the text itself as a historical document, and through the mind and heart of the Church. A final key principle of interpretation is to try to understand the intention of the sacred author. St. Luke is clearly telling us his intention.

It's worth noting that there are complicated and mysterious books and passages in Sacred Scripture. The first and last books of the Bible, Genesis and Revelation come to mind. But even here the Church offers guidance. We know that Adam and Eve were real people while the account of their fall uses “figurative language” as the Catechism says. The talking snake of Genesis is none other than the Devil as the book of Revelation tells us. And that mysterious book we know is a mystical vision of St. John's, not a narrative history of Jesus' life like St. Luke's Gospel is. All the Apostles suffered and died ultimately to pass on their testimony of Jesus to us!

There are admittedly different layers of meaning behind passages, and complicated passages at that. But what I have tried to stress today is the most important sense of scripture. The literal/historical sense is the one that all other meanings are based on.

In the end, God's Word can be trusted, and He gave it to us so that ***“we might realize the certainty of the teachings we have received.”***

God bless,

Fr. Mike

