

Adult Catechism January 16 , 2017

Christ Our Pascha: God's Revelation, Holy Tradition, Holy Scriptures, Kerygma (Proclamation), and Catechesis

Part 1: Introduction: The source of Christian life is faith in the risen Christ. (Christ our Pascha, Article 1). How each Christian group celebrates their faith in the Risen Christ is what makes each church so unique. Our Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church developed its own sense of identity through the centuries, first through the preaching of the Apostle Andrew, then through the Apostles to the Slavs: Cyril and Methodius. When St. Volodymyr the Great Baptized Rus-Ukraine in 988, the Word of the Gospel found its response of faith in the hearts of those who listened. (Christ Our Pascha, Preface).

In our current generation, we need to refocus on learning the beautiful traditions and services of our Ukrainian Catholic Church. A study of Christ Our Pascha will deepen our faith and help us to understand the meaning and history of these traditions.

The first part of Christ our Pascha uses the Anaphora of St. Basil the Great (which is read by the priest 10 times during the year during the liturgy of St. Basil the Great). The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that we read during each Divine Liturgy is a key text to understanding our faith as Catholics. This symbol of our faith is a basic summary of what we believe, and needs to be reflected upon in our hearts, minds, and souls, so that we continue to lead lives worthy of eternal salvation.

Briefly, the Symbol of Faith as found in the Creed leads us into the very Mystery of Divine Reality, a prayerful contemplation of the Church, the sign of unity of Christians in the faith (Christ our Pascha, Preface). The Divine Liturgy on the other hand, proclaims the Risen Christ within history, witnessing to the events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, and helping the faithful become one Body in Christ (ibid.). The Anaphora of St. Basil the Great reflects upon the saving event of Christ's Passover, in the context of the story of creation and salvation in the world by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (ibid.).

Part 2: God's Revelation: The faith of the Church is founded on God's Revelation. By this Revelation the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, speaks to human beings to make himself known to them and to call them to communion with him: "in his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to them and to call them to communion with him: "In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (see Eph 1:9) by which humankind might have access in the Holy Spirit to the Father and come to share in the divine nature through Christ, the Word made flesh (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4). God, who "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Tm 6:16; see Jn 1:8; 1 Jn 4:12), "came clothed in flesh ... so that both the living and the dead might know of his visitation and of the coming of the Lord." By revealing himself, God, who in his essence is unknowable, "wishes to make [people] capable of responding to him,

and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity." (Christ Our Pascha, Section 18).

God has often revealed Himself to men through means beyond the ordinary course of nature. This is supernatural, or Divine Revelation, as opposed to the natural revelation of Himself that God makes in the external world, and the revelation He makes through our natural reason and conscience. Some revealed truths are beyond the power of the human understanding; we could never, by our own abilities, have known such truths if God had not revealed them. For instance, could we by ourselves have known about the Blessed Trinity, had God not revealed it? The public revelation of truths to men by God began with Adam and Eve and ended at the death of Saint John the Apostle.

Private revelations have been made to holy persons, such as those of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary, and those of Our Lady of Lourdes to St. Bernadette. But these private revelations are never proposed to the faithful as articles of faith. When the Church approves them, it merely states that there is nothing in them contrary to faith or morals. Divine Revelation may be classified into pre-Christian and Christian revelation. Pre-Christian revelation may be divided into:

- A) primitive revelation, made to Adam and Eve;
- B) patriarchal revelation, made to the patriarchs; and
- C) Mosaic revelation, made to Moses and the prophets.

God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise. He spoke to Abraham, to Noah, sending Noah to preach to sinful men before the Flood. He sent Moses to the Israelites when Pharaoh oppressed them. The patriarchs and prophets were called messengers of God, and often received from Him extraordinary powers, of miracles and prophecy, in order that they might be believed.

Christian revelation contains the truths revealed to us by Jesus Christ, either directly or through His Apostles. Our Lord commanded His Apostles to teach all these truths to the end of time. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

We should believe in Divine Revelation because God, Who is its Author, cannot deceive nor be deceived. No reasonable man can believe in any truth until he is sure it is revealed by God. We know that God is the Author of Revelation because He has proved it by external acts, especially by miracles and prophecies. The writers who made Divine Revelation known worked under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Who is, therefore its Author. Miracles are extraordinary works perceptible to the senses, that cannot be accomplished by the mere powers of nature. They are brought about by the action of a higher power. The coming to life of a dead man is a miracle. So is the instantaneous cure of a man blind or paralytic from birth. Our Lord and the Apostles worked many miracles. Some extraordinary works never before heard of or known but invented are not miracles. They are mere discoveries of previously unknown processes or combinations. An example is the radio. And so were the first telegraph, telephone, wireless, phonograph, etc. All of these are very wonderful. Even today people in general do not understand them fully. But they are not miracles, because they are produced by the forces of nature as harnessed through the ingenuity of man.

Prophecies are predictions of future events that could not have been known by natural means. For the confirmation of the faith, or for the benefit of men, God raised up prophets. Generally speaking, the gift of prophecy is a sure sign that the possessor is a messenger of God. The prophets told about the coming of the Messiah. Their prophecies were fulfilled when Christ came on earth. The major prophets were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are distinguished from the twelve minor prophets, because of the greater volume of their prophecies. Forecasting the weather correctly is not prophecy. It is the result of a scientific knowledge of natural facts.

Divine Revelation has come down to us through Holy Scripture, written down under divine inspiration, and through Tradition, handed down orally from Apostolic times.

From Adam and Eve, at different times, God inspired men to write down His revelations. These passed from generation to generation as sacred books. For pre-Christian revelation, there were forty-five of these sacred books, composing the Old Testament. They were jealously guarded by the Israelites, the Chosen People, whom God Himself had chosen to keep His truths intact for the instruction of future generations.

Finally, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, came to earth to reveal Divine truths to men. After His death, His Apostles and disciples wrote about Him and His teachings. There are twenty-seven of these books, composing the New Testament. With the forty-five books of the Old Testament they were scattered in different parts of the world, until the Church gathered them together into one Book, Holy Scripture, or the Bible. The deposit of faith which Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church is made up of two parts: Holy Scripture, and Divine Tradition, this latter being composed of the truths passed down by word of mouth, and not written down till after the death of Christ's Apostles and disciples, principally by the Fathers of the Church. Divine Revelation was completed at the death of the last of the Apostles. Since that time no new revelation has been made for the instruction of the whole of mankind. Whenever the Church decides a point of faith, it does so according to Scripture or Tradition. It simply finds out what has been revealed from the beginning. (Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc007.htm>)

Part 3: Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture: Not all the truths revealed for us by God are found in the Bible; some are found only in Divine Tradition. The Bible itself states that it does not contain all that God revealed: "There are, however, many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21:25). The truths of Divine Revelation which have not been written down in Holy Scripture have come to us by the Tradition of the Church. By Divine Tradition is meant the revealed truths taught by Christ and His Apostles, which were given to the Church only by word of mouth and not through the Bible, though they were put in writing principally by the Fathers of the Church. In a wide sense, Tradition embraces the whole teaching of the Church, including the Bible, since it is only from the Church that we have the Bible. In a stricter sense, Tradition includes only what was handed down orally from the Apostles.

The Apostles themselves say that there is much that they have delivered to the faithful by word of mouth (2 John 12; 1 Cor. 11:2). Among many examples of truths in Tradition, not clearly manifested in Holy scriptures, are: the exact number of sacraments, the time of institution of some sacraments, the books that make up the Bible, the Baptism of infants, and Sunday observance. All the truths of Divine Tradition now have found their way into books. From the first Christian centuries, the practices and doctrines of Tradition were preserved by saintly teachers whom we call Fathers of the Church. They were disciples of the Apostles, contemporaries of those disciples, or disciples of the disciples. These holy and learned men instructed the Church in the years of its first growth. Chief among the Eastern Fathers of the first six centuries are: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (whose work has survived only in Latin translation), Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, and the three Cappadocian Fathers, Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa. There are many more, however.

Besides the writings of the Fathers, the truths of Divine Tradition may be found chiefly in: (a) writings of the Doctors of the Church; (b) decrees of Popes and Church councils; and (c) the liturgy of the Church as found in the Missal and rituals.

Why must Divine Tradition be believed as firmly as the Bible? -- Divine Tradition must be believed as firmly as the Bible because it also contains the word of God.

Several years passed before the Gospels were written down. In the meantime, Christians had to depend on Tradition solely: Tradition is older than the New Testament. When the books composing the New Testament were written, the various writers had some definite and immediate purpose in mind. For example, St. Paul wrote his Epistles to the various churches of Gentiles that he had converted, to remind them of his teachings in his absence. St. Luke wrote his Gospel for the citizen of Rome, Theophilus, to instruct him in the new religion. St. John's Gospel was to combat heresies denying the divinity of Christ.

If the Church teaches any doctrine that cannot be found in Holy Scripture, it will be found in Tradition, and therefore traceable to the Apostles. Those who follow up the course of a river gradually draw near the source, and discover whence the waters flow. In the same way, we can trace the historical sources of the teachings of the Church and arrive at their source: the Apostles themselves.

Divine Tradition teaches us all the doctrines that were taught by the Apostles. It comes to us from the Apostles. Every single doctrine the Church teaches comes direct from the Apostles. The Church does not issue new doctrines. The four Evangelists wrote their relations of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in widely separated places; it is a proof of authenticity that the Gospels agree in their essentials, and often even repeat the very same words. When the writers of the New Testament did begin to write, they did not intend to set down all the details of Catholic faith and practice, but only such points as were immediately interesting or that needed clarification.

Tradition teaches us what books belong to the Bible. By tradition the Church kept intact all the books of the Bible for fifteen hundred years before the existence of denominations that nevertheless assert the Church does not care for the Bible. Protestant denominations reject Tradition. Consequently, they cannot agree about which books to include in the Bible. One denomination eliminates one part, other denominations omit other parts, according to the respective private interpretation. Having rejected Tradition, Protestants cannot be certain that the books they have accepted are genuine. On whose authority have they accepted what they have? Protestant Bibles, the most popular of which is called the "King James version," omit all or parts of the Books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Machabees (I and II), and parts of Esther and Daniel. Luther rejected the Epistle of St. James, because the Apostle said that faith without works is dead. Luther and followers omitted the Apocalypse, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Epistle of St. Jude.

The Bible is the Word of God written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and contained in the books of the Old and the New Testaments. The seventy-two sacred books, together forming the Bible, were composed by forty writers in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The period of composition covers at least 1,300 years, from Moses, to St. John the Evangelist.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1).

The writers were inspired by God. By a supernatural influence, God enlightened their mind and moved their will to write all that He wished, and only that. They acted as free instruments of God, Who directed them and preserved them from error.

The writers of Holy Scripture were, however, not passive instruments. Each writer brought his personality with him into what he wrote. The writers were like skilled painters who paint from the same model. The products are similar and all correct, but with differences according to talents.

God is the Author of the Bible. An author is not the stenographer that writes down what he is told, but the one who tells what is to be written. Since God is the Author, the Bible cannot contain any error. "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Copyists and printers, however, can and do make mistakes in copying the Bible. Since the Bible is the Word of God, it must be treated with the greatest reverence. This is why we take solemn oaths on the Bible, stand up when the Gospel is read, and have incense and lights used when the Gospel is sung at Divine Liturgy.

Science throughout the years has been proving itself the handmaid, instead of the enemy, of the Bible. Recent excavations and researches have proved that such distant events as the Fall of Jericho, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the Flood, really and actually happened, and are no mere figures of speech. Remains have been found that include information on events that took place in the times of Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jeremiah the Prophet; even the name of Abraham has been found.

The Old Testament was recognized by Jesus Christ, approved by Him, and often quoted by Him. Evidences from the New Testament prove that this was written by Christ's Apostles and disciples.

The style of the Gospels shows clearly that they were written by Jews. That the writers lived in the first century is shown by the vividness of their knowledge about Jerusalem, which was destroyed before the end of that century. The earliest Christian writers testify to the reliability of the Gospels; the consent of the churches of the time proves such reliability. The Gospels have not been changed by the passage of centuries. This can be proved from the oldest copies, from ancient translations and quotations. The Gospels could not have been altered, because the fervor of the early Christians carefully guarded them. When in the fourth century St. Jerome was ordered by Pope Damasus to gather all existing texts of the Bible and translate them into Latin, there were some 35,000 ancient copies. After thirty-four years of labor, he finished the translation, our Catholic Bible, called the Latin Vulgate, from which the Catholic English version has been made.

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament, written before Christ, consists of forty-five books: Twenty-one historical books relating to the earliest ages of the world, or to the history of the Jews, among which books are the five books of Moses and the four books of Kings; Seven doctrinal books, made up of maxims and prayers, among which are the Psalms and the Proverbs; and Seventeen prophetic books, of four greater and twelve lesser prophets, among which books are Isaias, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

The New Testament, written after the Ascension of Christ, consists of twenty-seven books, as follows: The four Gospels according to Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, containing the story of the life of Christ; The Acts of the Apostles, by St. Luke, containing the history of the Apostles after the Ascension of Our Lord into heaven; Twenty-one epistles by Sts. Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude; and The Apocalypse by St. John. The four Gospels and the Acts are mainly historical. The Epistles are doctrinal. The Apocalypse is prophetic.

Who are the four Evangelists? -- The four Evangelists are Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. St. Matthew was one of the twelve Apostles. Before he followed Our Lord, he was a tax-gatherer or publican called Levi. Matthew was the first Evangelist to write the Gospel, about six years after Our Lord's Ascension. His work, written in Hebrew for the Jews of Palestine, was translated into Greek in the time of the Apostles. His work shows Jesus as proving Himself to be the promised Messiah. St. Mark was the disciple of St. Peter, and wrote according to what he heard from St. Peter himself. He wrote for the Christians of Rome about ten years after Our Lord's Ascension. St. Peter approved what he wrote, which shows Christ as the Son of God. St. Luke was converted by St. Paul and became his disciple. He wrote about twenty-four years after Our Lord's Ascension, for a distinguished citizen of Rome. His work contains many details about the Blessed Virgin. St. John was Christ's Beloved Disciple. He wrote about sixty-three years after Our Lord's Ascension. The last of the Apostles to die, he wrote in his old age to testify, against heretics who had arisen, that Jesus Christ is true God. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc008.htm>

Part 4: Kerygma (Proclamation) and Catechesis: “Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Mt 28: 19-20). All the baptized and confirmed (chrismated) in Christ have received the mission to evangelize. The fulfillment of this mission demands ongoing preparation, education in faith for people of all ages, and a spirit of prayer that the whole message of Christ may be proclaimed (Redemptoris Missio n.83).

Who is to evangelize? The mission of Jesus (Mt 28) is very clear: all disciples are called to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News. The family is the primary center of evangelization, as our traditions and faith are made real and passed on from generation to generation. The church family lives out its responsibility to proclaim the Holy Gospel of Jesus in the Holy Mysteries, in catechesis, in community and service to others, and in works of charity and justice. A parish that does not evangelize dies! In the church family, the clergy and religious members, as well as informed and educated laity, are to be in the forefront of evangelization and reconciliation. The various parish organizations, societies and ministries cooperate in evangelization and reconciliation.

Efforts to evangelize flourished in the first half of the 20th century, largely because of the living day-to-day example set by holy people. Many souls were evangelized through the observation of lives of steadfast faith. Simple words of consolation, forgiveness and patience were a light in otherwise shadow filled days. This call from Christ within us places responsibility for spiritual development on each of us. Our individual responsibility is shared with the community of faith, our families, our parishes, our Eparchy, and our whole Ukrainian Catholic Church. From the earliest Christian times, it was always recognized that it takes a lifetime to grow in faith. St. Paul's letter to the Galatians points this out: “my little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). Once our faith matures, we are able to say with St. Paul that: “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). (Taken from 2005 Eparchy of Saskatoon Sobor Document).