



**Reverence for the Word**

Word and sacrament are inseparably united. Both command profound reverence. The custom of kissing the Book of Gospels, which remains with the Church today, arose in the early centuries of Christianity, as did the custom of “enthroning” the biblical books in the Church. The Word is the Lord’s, but it is revealed to mankind. It must be written, but primarily so that it can be proclaimed “in the midst of the assembly” (Sir 15:5) in every generation.

# THE BIBLE

## A CATHOLIC GUIDE

BY SCOTT HAHN

The Bible is the Word of God in human words. Because it comes to us from Almighty God, it has the power to be life-transforming; God knows each of us, and he knows what we need when we open the book.

Sometimes we find his Word thundering from above, sometimes whispering in a still, small voice — but always, it is the Word sent by the all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God.

The Bible is a whole library of books written over the course of more than a thousand years, in many different styles, with many different points of view, by dozens of different writers.

But it is also one book, with one Author, telling one story — the heart-pounding, thrill-a-minute story of our salvation.

**How to read the Bible as a faithful Catholic**

Scholars have written mighty tomes, and saints have spent long lives, teaching people what it means to read the Bible faithfully. Here we'll offer just a brief word on interpretation — three short principles, actually, that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) decreed in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. These “criteria” were summarized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the following form:

**“Be attentive ‘to the content and unity of the whole Scripture’” (No. 112).**

The Church’s first criterion protects us from wrenching verses out of context, making them out to mean something other than their divine and human authors intended. The true context of every verse in the Bible is the words and paragraphs that surround it — the book in which it appears. The true context is the book of the Bible, but also the book that is the Bible.

**“Read the Scripture within ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’” (No. 113).**

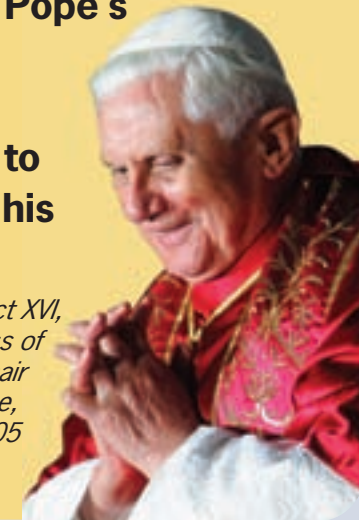
The second criterion places the Bible firmly within the context of a community that treasures a “living tradition.” That community is the Communion of Saints. We test our own interpretations, measuring them against the tradition of interpreters who have gone before us. The Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton called this principle the “democracy of the dead.” We believe that our ancestors have much to teach us. They should have a vote. It protects us from the ever-present arrogance that believes we have just now reached the pinnacle of human knowledge and insight.

**“Be attentive to the analogy of faith” (No. 114).**

The third criterion leads us to examine scriptural texts within the framework of the fullness of Catholic faith. If we believe that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, we must also believe them to be internally coherent and consistent with all Catholic doctrine. The Church’s dogmas are not something added to Scripture. In the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI): “Dogma is by definition nothing other than an interpretation of Scripture.”

**The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the Pope’s ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word.**

— Pope Benedict XVI, homily, Mass of Possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, May 7, 2005



**Test your knowledge**

- All of the books of the New Testament were written in:
  - A. Hebrew
  - B. Greek
  - C. Aramaic
- True or False:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel and Daniel are known as major prophets because they are more important than the other prophetic books.
- The oldest version of the Old Testament is called:
  - A. The Vulgate
  - B. The Douay-Rheims
  - C. The Septuagint
- True or False:** Baruch is one of the deuterocanonical books.
- The story of David conquering Goliath appears in which book?
  - A. 1 Samuel
  - B. 1 Kings
  - C. 1 Chronicles
- Lectionary readings at Mass come from which version of the Bible?
  - A. King James Version
  - B. New American Bible
  - C. Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition
- True or false:** Galatians is the longest of St. Paul’s letters?

Answers below

**How the Bible unfolds in the Mass**

The Mass is the one thing that Catholics experience on a weekly basis all their lives, and the Bible is the one book that they will hear at every Mass. Since Masses on Sundays and holy days usually include three readings from the two testaments, plus a psalm, the average faithful Catholic spends about 15 hours a year in focused Bible study. For the Catholic who goes to daily Mass, the totals rival even the hours spent by some scholars.

In addition to the readings, here is where you can find the Bible parts of the Mass:

Trinitarian blessing: **Mt 28:19**

Apostolic greeting: **2 Cor 13:13**

“The Lord be with you”: **2 Thes 3:1**

“I confess...”: **After Psalm 51; Jas 5:16; and others**

“Lord, have mercy”: **Mt 17:15**

Gloria: **Lk 2:14**

“Alleluia”: **Rv 19:1-6**

“Lift up your hearts”: **Lam 3:41**

“Holy, holy, holy”: **Rv 4:8**

The Great Amen: **Rv 5:14**

The Lord’s Prayer: **Mt 6:9-13**

“Lamb of God”: **Jn 1:29**

“Behold the Lamb”: **Rv 19:9**

Dismissal: **Lk 7:50**

“Thanks be to God”: **2 Cor 9:15**



**Quiz key** 1 B. While all of the New Testament books were written in Greek, most of the Old Testament books were written in Hebrew. 2 False, the length of the books, not their importance, determines whether they are labeled major or minor. 3 C. The Septuagint is traditionally attributed to the desire of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (r. 285-249 B.C.) to have a copy of the seven Old Testament books present in the Septuagint that were rejected by Protestants at the time of the Reformation. 4 True, Baruch is one of the deuterocanonical books. 5 The story of David and Goliath appears in 1 Sm 17. 6 B. Mass readings come from the New American Bible. 7 False, Romans is the longest of St. Paul’s letters.

**Old Testament**

- Genesis ●
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy ●
- Joshua
- Judges ●
- Ruth
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs
- Wisdom
- Sirach
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Baruch
- Ezekiel
- Daniel ●
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

**New Testament**

- Matthew ●
- Mark
- Luke ●
- John ●
- Acts
- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 1 John
- 2 John
- 3 John
- Jude
- Revelation

