

Introduction to the Timeline Bible Study: Part Two

My daughter Katherine, at the age of five and now at the age of thirty-six, always asks the same question before any family trip or gathering: “What’s the plan?” As a child, she wanted to know when the car was pulling out to the beach and what would be for dinner there. Now, she tries to organize her brothers for the annual trips home for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

As we begin our Bible Study, we can ask the same question when we pick up the Bible: “What’s the plan?” God has one; how comforting this is to know, especially in times of uncertainty! And it is a “**plan of loving goodness**” (CCC 510-51). **You were made out of love, to be loved and to love—to be drawn into the very life of God.**

What is God trying to tell us within His Word? Our only hope is in the goodness of God. “We are unable to save ourselves from sin, since the very powers that we would muster to do so—the mind, the will, and the passions—are precisely what sin has compromised. Our only hope, therefore, is in the **divine salvation offered as gift**...One of the most dangerous lies we tell ourselves is that everything is just fine: ‘I’m OK. You’re OK.’ Christianity is a salvation religion, and thus its basic assumption is that there is something wrong with us, indeed something so wrong that we could never in principle fix it ourselves.”¹

How would you describe the plan of God to your young child or grandchild? Young adult? Peer? Why is it important to start with the goodness of God? _____

God is “after us. Biblical religion is not primarily about our quest for God; it is about God’s quest for us. For the authors of the Bible, the interesting thing is not that we seek joy and spiritual fulfillment. The interesting thing is that **God seeks us with a reckless abandon.**”² In the Genesis account of Creation and the Fall, as soon as Adam and Eve sin, they hide, ashamed and avoiding their Maker, but God comes looking for them. The entire Story of Salvation can be summarized by a question directed to each one of us:

“Will you give God permission to truly see you as you are? Will you give God permission to love you as you are? Let yourself be seen, known, and loved by Jesus!”³ _____

Now let’s review some notes from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 50-141 for an overview of how to read Scripture, before launching into its actual content.

By what two ways has God revealed to us “his plan of loving goodness”? (CCC 50)

¹ Barron, Bishop Robert. *Centered: The Spirituality of Word on Fire*. © 2020 by Word on Fire Ministries, Park Ridge, IL, pp 93, 89.

² Barron, Bishop Robert. *Centered: The Spirituality of Word on Fire*. © 2020 by Word on Fire Ministries, Park Ridge, IL, pp 31.

³ Keynote speaker Fr Mike Schmitz for online FOCUS Conference *SEEK21*, Feb 6, 2021.

*1- _____
*2- _____

This access to the Father enables us to become “sharers in the _____”
(CCC 51). How does Ephesians 2:18 describe what Jesus has done for us? Hebrews 1:1-4;
Hebrews 7:25? _____

For what purpose does God reveal Himself? (CCC 52) _____

God loves you whether you respond to Him today or not. “Imagine a crowd of farmers listening to the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20). The original hearers of this tale would have exchanged glances and rolled their eyes at the ridiculousness of this farmer. That was precisely the reaction that Jesus wanted. For God is like this crazy farmer, sowing the seed of his word and his love—not only on receptive soil, not only to those who will respond, but also on the path, on the rocks, and among the thorns, lavishly pouring out his love on those who are least likely to respond. **God’s love is irrational, extravagant, embarrassing, unreasonable, completely over the top.**”⁴ And this reckless “goodness and love will pursue (you) all the days of your life” (Psalm 23:6; John 15:16).

God’s love is personal (specifically *FOR* you) and constant, even predating your birth! As Jesus told St Faustina, (echoing Jeremiah 1:5): “Before I made the world, I loved you with the love your heart is experiencing today and, throughout the centuries, My love will never change (1754)... Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them, that I listen intently to the beating of their heart. When will it beat for Me?” (1728).⁵

Sister Faustina beautifully summarizes the tone of Jesus and **the tenor of Scripture** in her recording what Jesus said to her in private revelation: “Be not afraid of your Savior, O sinful soul. I make the first move to come to you, for I know that by yourself you are unable to lift yourself to me. Child, do not run away from your Father; be willing to talk openly with your God of mercy who wants to speak words of pardon and lavish his graces on you. How dear your soul is to Me. I have inscribed your name upon My hand; **you are engraved as a deep wound in My Heart.**”⁶

What causes you “to be afraid of your Savior” or run from God? Despair? A sense of unworthiness? Shame? _____
Ponder the fact that “you are engraved as a deep wound in Jesus’ heart.” (See Isaiah 49:16)
Write your reflections here. _____

⁴ Barron, Bishop. *Daily Gospel Reflections* accessed on-line at [wof\[wordonfire.org](http://wof[wordonfire.org) on January 27, 2021.

⁵ Gaitley, Fr Michael, MIC. *Consoling the Heart of Jesus*. © 2010 by the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M., Stockbridge, MA, pp 275, 277.

⁶ *Diary of St Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul, (1485), pp 523.*

“When we know who God is, we know who we are. When we know who we are – beloved, weak, tempted creatures made in God’s image, in need of redemption lest we be lost—we can reach out to the only One who can, indeed, save us. And here rests the paradox: as we embrace Truth, we humbly accept our emptiness and dependence on God, and then we can finally be filled—to overflowing even!”⁷

How has God revealed Himself to us through the ages—gradually or all at once? CCC 53 _____

Revelation refers to an action on the part of God to show us something about His nature or plan that we could not naturally discern by ourselves. To approach Scripture requires humility on our part. This is why Jesus said we must first become like little children. We do not know everything (or much of anything)!

“One of my favorite images of St Francis has him standing before Jesus with his arms open wide. He is vulnerable and he is open. I want that to always be the manner in which I approach God. It’s about God and what he wants to do in and through you and me. I don’t think we can approach the Lord with a list of conditions and qualifications. Rather, we approach him as a blank slate and invite him to make something beautiful. Then we step back and watch the Master work.”⁸

“God invites you to intimate _____ with himself” (CCC 54).

The entire Bible can be seen as God’s attempt to restore friendship with us.

Has or will God ever give up on you, no matter your specific sin committed? CCC 55 _____

Three important facts about the Word of God:

(1) “_____ is the author of Sacred Scripture” (CCC 105). See 2 Timothy 3:16.

(2) “_____ inspired the human authors” (CCC 106).

(3) “The inspired books teach the truth without _____” (CCC 107).

The principle of Biblical inerrancy follows the principle of divine authorship.

Read CCC 109-114 to understand the criteria for interpreting Scripture.

It emphasizes three points:

1. Be attentive to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.

Take every verse or passage in context. Scripture never contradicts itself.

For example, you might have been asked: “Why do you call your priest “Father” when it clearly states in Matthew 23:9- “Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven”? *When approaching one particular Scripture, it is wise to do a word search to determine where else in Scripture that word or phrase is used.* In the New Testament alone the word “father” is referred to human beings 124 times (i.e., Luke 11:11, Luke 12:53, Romans 4:12, Acts 7:2, etc). “From the incredible number of times that human beings are called ‘father’

⁷ Welborn, Amy. *Praying with the Pivotal Players*. © 2016 by Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, Park Ridge, IL, p 32.

⁸ Pivonka, Fr Dave, TOR. *Breath of God: Living a Life Led by the Holy Spirit*. © 2015 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp 35-36.

(Greek: 'pater') in the New Testament, it appears that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the title in-and-of-itself. Why then St Paul call himself "father (1 Corinthians 4:15-16) and Catholics call their priests "father"? Traditionally, a father provides food for his family, brings new life into the world, and counsels and encourages members of his family to lead good and upright lives. Note that in the Scriptures, Jesus makes the clear statement that He is THE Good Shepherd (John 10:14) while at the same time he also commissions *certain human beings* to shepherd His people in His physical absence (John 21:15-17; Ephesians 4:11).

From looking at the whole of the New Testament, it appears that what Jesus is saying in Matthew 23:9 is simply a restatement of the First Commandment: "You shall not have other gods besides me" (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). Or, in other words, remember that there is only one *heavenly* Father (who is the source of all *earthly* Fatherhood).

So when Catholics call their priests 'father' they are certainly not saying that they are equal to God the Father in heaven. It simply says that, like St Paul in his God-given role as spiritual 'father' of various early Christian communities, the priest is also exercising a spiritual 'fatherly' role as he feeds his congregation with the Holy Eucharist and with the Word of God, as he brings new Christians into the world through the waters of Baptism, and as he encourages and exhorts members of his spiritual 'family' to lead holy lives."⁹

2. Read the Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church—from the heart of the Church.

"The minute you say "Tradition," a lot of people think that you're talking about things like holy cards, the Mass in Latin, and long-habited nuns. These are memories of *culture*, not faith; they're matters of custom, and they don't have anything to do with Tradition.

Tradition- with a capital T—isn't something you do. It's something you know. Tradition is the body of unwritten knowledge given by Christ to the Apostles and handed down by them to their successors, the Church's bishops, who teach it to everybody else. It's the first thing you have to know about the Church, because that's how it all started. After all, Christ himself never wrote a word of his teachings, and during the first couple of generations after him the Apostles converted thousands by word of mouth- by Tradition- long before the Bible was assembled.

The New Testament is really only one of the many products of Tradition....It's not really surprising that there would be written and unwritten parts of Christian revelation, because that's how revelation has worked ever since Genesis. The revelation to the Jews is embodied in Torah, which came in two forms too. The written part is the texts we know as the first five books of the Bible, and then there's the oral tradition handed down among the priests and rabbis that was never written down (Malachi 2:7). The Evangelists and the disciples who wrote the Epistles made it clear that they weren't writing down everything (See John 16:12-13; Heb 13:22; 2 John 12:3). Acts also shows the primary importance of spoken teachings (Acts 2:1-42; 8:4-6).

Basically, the Church doesn't hold any truth on the basis of Scripture without Tradition. But then, she doesn't hold any truth on the basis of Tradition without Scripture, either. You can't take one without the other because Sacred Tradition is the only source of information

⁹ Romero, Fr Mario. *Unabridged Christianity: Biblical Answers to Common Questions About the Roman Catholic Faith*. © 1999 by Queenship Publishing, Goleta, CA, pp 1-5.

about fundamentally important ideas like the Trinity, which isn't explicit in the Bible. One thing is certain, though: **you need to refer to Tradition if you want an authentic interpretation of the Bible.** Without reference to Tradition, you can end up taking Biblical passages out of context. (See 2 Peter 1:20).

There's only one Tradition, but it has a different appearance, depending on when you look at it. There's *divine* Tradition, given by God the Father before Christ's coming and by Christ himself afterward. The next phase was *apostolic* Tradition, which is the expansion of Christ's teaching given to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15). This is the Tradition that the Church first communicated through the Apostles' oral teaching, and it was during this phase of Tradition that the New Testament got written down. The third phase of Tradition resides in the *living voice of the Church*, which comes to us now through the bishops as the successors of the Apostles who are entrusted with preserving and spreading the teachings of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit to protect them from error. It was through ecclesiastical Tradition that the Bible was put together!"¹⁰

3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith (how the truths all fit together).

Read CCC 115-119 to understand the three senses of Scripture.

- 1. The literal sense**—the intended meaning
- 2. The spiritual sense** (three aspects)
 - a. Allegorical*- how does it relate to Christ?
 - b. Moral*- how does it relate to my conduct and life?
 - c. Anagogical*- how does it relate to eternity/ future?¹¹

Summary:

"The word of God is Scripture. The Word of God is also Jesus. This close association between God's written word and his eternal Word is intentional and has been the custom of the Church since the first generation. "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, 'because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ' (CCC 134)."¹² God's plan (or the story of salvation) unfolds in Scripture. "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the new" (St Augustine). The sacraments and the liturgy are the means of how we enter into the story, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we live in Christ, in the story.

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¹⁰ Johnson, Kevin. *Why Do Catholics Do That?: A Guide to the Teachings and Practices of the Catholic Church*. © 1994 by Ballantine Books, New York, NY, pp 3-6.

¹¹ Cavins, Jeff. *Workbook: The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation*. © 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, p 14.

¹² Introduction to *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, Revised Standard Version/ 2nd Edition, pp 7.