Lesson 1: God’s Self Revelation

1. Our Search For Happiness

I. Why do we do anything?

A. Everything we do is a search for happiness.
   1. We desire happiness, fulfillment, joy, peace, and love more than anything else.
   2. We often search for happiness in all the wrong places. Even bad things are done because of the perceived happiness they will bring the person.
   3. Although material goods are “good” they cannot give us lasting, profound happiness. All things will eventually leave us empty and unfilled, with the feeling that there is something more, something deeper.

B. This never ending search for happiness should make us ask the “important questions”:
   1. Who am I? Where am I from? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What will make me truly happy? What is truth?

II. These important questions lead us to inquire about the existence of God.

A. Observation of the natural world:
   1. “If things created are so full of loveliness, how resplendent with beauty must be the One who made them!” – St. Anthony of Padua
   2. (CCC 32) Starting from movement, becoming, contingency, and the world's order and beauty, one can come to a knowledge of God as the origin and the end of the universe.
   3. (Rom 1:18-21) “The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened.”

B. Observation of ourselves:
   1. (CCC #33) With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material", can have its origin only in God.
      a) If we desire these lasting, authentic happiness, fulfillment and love, but they can never be fully satisfied by earthly things, they must be by something eternal.
   2. “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you!” - St. Augustine of Hippo
III. Therefore, the search for answers to our most significant questions for enduring, everlasting happiness is a search for God.

A. (CCC 27) The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for:

B. (CCC 30) Although man can forget God or reject him, He never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, "an upright heart", as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.

1. Identifying obstacles to our search for God:
   a) This search for happiness, truth, God requires total honesty, openness, courage, sacrifice, perseverance and finally, commitment.
   b) Once we know what is true, right, and just, we must pursue it! This is what the parables about the treasure and pearl are all about.
      (1) (Matt 13:44-45) “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

2. The tragedy is when people content themselves with those things that don’t give authentic happiness because it is the path of least resistance.

3. In the end, they won’t be deeply happy, but empty and possibly enslaved to that thing which gave them instant gratification.

C. The necessary pre-requisite: The search for answers to our questions requires a desire for truth about ourselves, God and the world. The search for answers requires us to look outside ourselves. (Matt 5:6 & Jer 29:13)

2. God Self-Revelation:

I. Why did God reveal himself to us?

A. “Natural Revelation” is not enough to know God. We cannot reach up to him ourselves. Think of the “blind men and the elephant.”

B. But, God wants us to know him, love him and to partake in his own life and happiness!

1. (CCC 51) "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature."

2. (CCC 52) God, who "dwells in unapproachable light", wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son. By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity.

3. (John 10:10) “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
C. *** Divine Revelation enables us to have a relationship with God, who is Love, so we can fulfill our deepest longings for happiness, meaning and love!

II. Revelation in the Old Testament:
A. Remember, the purpose of God’s revelation is to make us his adopted children in Christ. This happens through a series of covenants, beginning with Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. In each of these covenants God expands his family with the intention of calling all nations into one kingdom, one family, one church in Jesus Christ.

III. Jesus Christ:
A. [Heb 1:1-2] “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe.”
B. He made outlandish claims of divinity and demanded worship! What kind of man would do this? He is either a “Liar, Lunatic or Lord.” (C.S. Lewis)

3. The Preservation of God’s Revelation:

I. [Vatican II, Dei Verbum, # 7] God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations.
A. The Apostle’s Witness of Jesus life and gospel, the “deposit of faith,” is handed down throughout the generations in two ways (CCC 76):
   1. orally: "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit"
   2. in writing: "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing".
B. (CCC 77) "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority." Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."
   1. Sacred Tradition is the living transmission (the handing down) of the entirety of God’s revelation, both in its oral or in written forms, by the apostles to their successors under the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit.
   2. Sacred Scripture is the revelation of God put down in writing by human authors under the unique inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
C. The source of this revelation is God, the goal is eternal communion with God.
II. The Catholic Church and the “deposit of faith”:
   A. The Holy Spirit was sent to guide the Church down through the generations.
      1. [John 16:12-13] “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.” (See also John 14:15-26.)
   B. The Holy Spirit guards and protects the “Magisterium” from teaching error.
      1. (CCC 85) "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.
      2. [Mat 16:18-19] I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
      3. [Matt 18:18] Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
      4. [Luke 10:16] Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

Take away points: Remember the key question: Why should I believe? On God’s authority.

1. We all desire true, lasting happiness.
2. Our desire for happiness ultimately leads us to God.
3. We can know that God exists with reason alone, but cannot know who God is.
4. God has not left us orphans (John 14:18), but gradually revealed himself to us.
5. Christ is the fullness of God’s revelation. If he’s not truly Lord, he’s a liar or lunatic.
6. The entirety of God’s self-revelation is preserved in the Catholic Church.

*** How should we respond to God’s revelation? — Next week’s topic...