

Objective #1:

Recognize the presence of God at work in our lives

Summary Points:

- God is the only thing that will truly fulfill us
- This fulfillment comes from a relationship with God

Reflection:

What makes you happy? What kind of activities bring you joy? Maybe you enjoy playing cards or being active in sports. How do you feel after you finish participating in these activities? Do you always feel happy? Do these activities always make you feel more fulfilled? Probably not. Why? Because we are made for something so much greater than worldly things. What is it that brings us this everlasting joy? God. Sometimes we feel lonely. Where do we find companionship in our lives? Do you recognize that God is always with you?

Background Information/Questions:

St. Augustine once said, "Our hearts are restless until we rest in You." What do you think this means?

As humans, we have a sense of trying to find ourselves or find meaning in our lives. We are never fully satisfied with what we have or who we are; we always want more. We do have moments of satisfaction, but they are not everlasting. It is part of our human nature for our hearts to be drawn toward something—toward an ultimate goal. It is when we recognize the goal is to be in communion with God that we are set on the right path toward our ultimate fulfillment.

As the Catechism says, "We are always looking for something that gives us meaning and purpose. That 'something' is God" (CCC #27; YouCat #22).

If we recognize that God is the only answer to the meaning of life and that only a life lived for Him will bring us our ultimate happiness, does that mean we are physically going to be able to see Him? Not necessarily.

"Sometimes we have a hard time seeing God or having faith that He is with us" (YouCat #5 & #22. John 20:22-25). But that is why we have the gift of faith, that we might believe without seeing.

"Faith is a gift and a skill. God give us the ability to come to know Him and we can get better and recognizing His presence with practice" (YouCat #21 & #24).

There is a skill in recognizing God's presence

Even when Jesus was around, He told His disciples that it is important to have faith, and not to rely on seeing everything with our human eyes. Jesus told this to Thomas in the Upper Room.

So if we cannot physically see God, how do we know He is present in our lives? Here are some ways that God is present to His people.

1. He is present through the scriptures. We will be exploring the way God reveals Himself to us through Scripture in this semester.
2. God is present through the Church.
3. God is present through other people. When others act in love, they are being Christ's hands and feet for us. That is how we first know love.
4. God whispers to our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we just know God is with us.
5. God is present to us through our relationship with His Son, Jesus.
6. God is always present in the Eucharist and all Sacraments.

All of these are present at every Mass, that's why we are asked to be there. It's really tough to have faith without the nourishment the Liturgy provides.

What are examples of when you have experienced God in these ways?

Challenge for Catechist:

Am I disciplined enough to keep my eyes open and recognize the presence of God in my life? At the end of each day this week, write down where you recognized God's presence throughout your day.

Objective #2:

Know and identify God through His attributes

Summary Points:

- God is a mystery but we can still come to know Him; God is both Transcendent and Immanent
- God is mercy and love

Reflection:

Think about Abraham Lincoln. What do you know about him? What can you say about who he is? You can learn about him through books, talking to others about what they know about him. What about God? What do you know about Him? Can you describe Him? How do you learn about Him? Through your own experience? Through the Church? Yes! Just as we can list attributes about people, we can list permanent attributes about God. Although He is a mystery, we can describe Him in a way that helps us to understand the kind of God He is.

Background Information/Questions:

We cannot fully understand who God is. We can only know some ways of describing Him. These qualities that are attributed to God are known as attributes.

What words would you use to describe God? What role does He play in your life right now?

God is both transcendent and immanent.

Transcendent: being beyond human concept and understanding (CCC239)

Immanent: possible to comprehend or be aware of (CCC239)

God is both beyond our understanding but is also with us at all times. How have we experienced something of God that was beyond our ability to understand? How have you experienced God in your life?

God is love. He is a God of mercy and not a God of justice. He is here to love us, not to constantly look down on our sins. He is our best friend and biggest encourager.

If God wants to be our best friend, and He is love, then how do we let Him be our best friend? You become friends with someone that you spend time with. Friends share even the deepest parts of themselves with each other. God wants us to do this with Him. He wants to listen.

Other Vocabulary:

- Eternal (God has always been and always will be. Imagine that!)
- Unique (There is nothing else like God)
- Infinite (There are no boundaries to God)
- Omnipotent (God can do anything, Almighty, all-powerful)
- Omnipresent (God is everywhere)
- Immutable (God is constant, is the same now as before)

- Pure spirit (God is tangible. He became flesh, incarnate through Jesus)
- Alive (God is a living being)

Challenge:

Try to see God as someone who loves you for exactly who you are. Take five minutes each night before you go to bed to tell God everything about your day. Tell Him what you are thankful for, what you enjoyed, had fun doing, and what you struggled with. Ask Him to help you see Him as friend.

Objective #3

Know the Bible as the inspired Word of God

Summary Points:

- The Bible is the inspired Word of God
- God speaks to us through scriptures
- Have an understanding of what the Bible is made up of and why it's important
- Learn about the importance of stories in our lives

Reflection:

Think back to a story your parents told you when you were younger. What kind of lessons did you learn from the story? Why do you think you learned this lesson via a story? Stories are powerful ways for us to make situations connect to our own lives. For example, parents could just tell their children that lying is bad, but it is not as effective as telling the story of the little boy who cried wolf. We could have someone just tell us about our Catholic faith, but Jesus and the Bible use many stories to articulate our faith in order for us to apply it to our own lives.

Background Information/Questions:

The Bible has an Old and New Testament. The Old Testament was written before Christ was on Earth. The New Testament was written about and after Christ's time on Earth.

"God inspired the authors of Scripture and also must be present in the reading of Scripture. It is not something to be read purely academically, but something to be encountered as the Word of God" (CCC #108).

To say that God inspired the authors means there was in "in-breathing" of exactly what he wanted to be written in the Scripture (YouCat p. 21)

Within the Bible we find everything we need to get to Heaven. Much of this is done through stories. Through the stories and parables in Scripture, we learn life lessons about ourselves and who God created us to be.

Even the Apostles needed explanation about what God was trying to tell them. The Gospel of Mark contains many examples of Jesus explaining a parable to His Apostles so they understood more clearly the message He was trying to teach them.

God had the authors write in order that God could reveal Himself to humanity.

This revelation is the way God communicates with us about who He is. God's greatest revelation is Jesus Christ.

Challenge:

Find a story Jesus shares in Scripture. What lesson is God trying to teach you with this story? How can you apply this lesson to your daily routine today?

Objective #4:

Understand how God is the author of Scriptures through human writers.

Summary Points:

- Human authors wrote the Bible
- They were divinely inspired by God to write what he wanted
- Their writings are also influenced by the culture of their time

Reflection:

Read Corinthians Chapter 7:25-29. If you were to read this literally, what would you get out of it? Is Paul encouraging people not to get married because it is better to be free and avoid worldly troubles? What does that say about marriage today? Do we see it as a burden and something to avoid? No. It is important to understand that Paul's culture and perception is showing through in his writing. Paul believed that Christ's second coming would happen during his own lifetime so he was encouraging people to take any chance they could to focus all of their attention on being holy and living a sinless life. Paul simply thought marriage would not be as crucial if Christ was coming soon. How does this affect the way we read and interpret Scripture?

Background Information/Questions:

God is the author of Sacred Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of Scripture. We call this divine inspiration (CCC 105,106).

The human authors wrote only what God wanted them to write, and nothing more (CCC106).

The Bible contains that which we need to know to attain salvation (CCC 107).

Authors reflect their own cultures in their writings. "The reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current" (CCC 110).

The Church does not expect us to be able to interpret the author's intended meanings on our own. The faith community is important for reading scripture together and interpreting it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words" (CCC 109).

Scripture must be read prayerfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit (YOUCAT 18).

If something in Scripture doesn't seem consistent with what you know about God, it may be reflective of the author's time and culture. It does not mean the Scripture is wrong, it may have another meaning.

Challenge:

Read Ephesians 6:5. If you were to read this out of context of the rest of the passage, what would you say God is teaching about slavery? Now read Ephesians 6:9. Why was it necessary to understand the meaning of the first passage by reading the second?

Objective #5:

Appreciate the Catholic perspective that God reveals Himself through Scripture and Tradition

Summary Points:

- Sacred Tradition is the transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church
- Sacred Scripture is what the human authors wrote through Divine Inspiration
- Sacred Tradition and Scripture must go hand in hand to understand the fullness of how God has revealed Himself to us

Reflection:

Think back to the “Reflection” under objective #2 when you thought about everything you knew about Abraham Lincoln. If you didn’t know anything about him, what would be the most credible source for you to use? Usually we would say that information coming directly from the source would be the most credible. Reading an autobiography about someone gives you direct insight to their life in a way that an outside source could not. Although an autobiography might include all of the most important information, we usually do not stop there when we are trying to learn about someone. We also turn to other people’s stories about them. These stories help us to more fully understand a person because they provide another perspective. The same goes for Scripture and Tradition. Scripture is our written source that contains necessary information about our salvation, but we include Tradition as well to support and build on its contents.

Background Information/Questions:

As we have learned, it is important to not always read the Bible word for word. If we were to do this, we could miss the point of a lot of Christ’s teachings. The Church recognizes Sacred Scripture as containing that which we need to attain salvation but also believes there are truths about Catholicism that are not written into the Bible. One example of this would be Mary’s perpetual virginity. The Bible never says Mary remained a virgin all her life, but Tradition tells us this is so. Because Scripture contains necessary, but not all, truths, the Church teaches that both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are essential to learning about God’s revelation to us.

We have touched on Sacred Scripture an adequate amount, but what is Sacred Tradition? According to the Catechism, “And [Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching” (CCC 81).

In other words, Tradition is the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church.

There is a difference between Tradition with a Big “T” and tradition with a little “t”. Tradition with a Big “T” is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church’s magisterium” (CCC 83).

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture must go hand in hand. “As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (CCC 82).

How did God reveal himself through Sacred Tradition and Scripture?

- Jesus came to earth as the fullness of God’s revelation
- The New Testament was written within a few generations of Jesus’s Resurrection
- Churches began using these books in their worship.
- Bishops approved the books of the bible
 - After the authors wrote the books of the Bible, the Church reached a consensus that they were Sacred. (YouCat #14)
 - Some books that were written around the same time were not found to be Sacred and are, therefore, not a part of the Bible
- The Scriptures are available to you today to speak to you.

Challenge:

Research the Sacrament of Confirmation. Which parts of this Sacrament are pulled from Scripture? Which parts come from Sacred Tradition?

Objective #6:

Learn that Jesus is present in the words of Scriptures

Summary Points:

- Word of God refers to both Sacred Scripture and Jesus
- Jesus is truly present in Scripture; therefore, it should be considered a living word and be applied to our daily lives.

Reflection:

Do you have a journal? If not, pretend you do. What types of things do you write in it? Most likely you write down secrets or happenings of your life that are very personal to you. If someone were to read your journal, they would get a very deep insight to your life and who you are as a person. This is what Jesus did in the Bible. The Bible tells us about God. Just as we learned in the first objective, Jesus is present to us not only in the Eucharist but also in the living Scripture. When we understand this, we are able to see how we can learn about who Jesus is by reading the Bible.

Background Information/Questions:

Scripture is more than just the words the human authors wrote through the inspiration of God. We believe that Scripture *is* the Word of God.

When we use the term “Word of God,” we can be referring to two concepts. The most obvious is that we refer to the Sacred Scripture as the Words of God. But the second reference of Word of God is to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Word of God, the way that He reveals Himself (Hebrews 1:1-2, John 1:1-5).

Read John 1:1-5. It states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

God uses Sacred Scripture and Jesus Christ to reveal to us who He is. God used Sacred Scripture to teach us about Himself. He also revealed Himself to us through the incarnation of His Son, Jesus.

This is evident in the way that all Scripture points to Jesus. This does not only happen in the New Testament Gospels where the story of Jesus’ life is told, but also in the Old Testament before Jesus was born. There are prophecies in the Old Testament that talk about the coming of a Messiah. These prophecies are fulfilled when God is made incarnate (made human) in the form of Jesus. Jesus is present in these Old Testament writings and it is the Holy Spirit that comes to help us understand and interpret these Scriptures.

These prophecies, or predictions, are called Messianic Prophecies. There are many instances in the Bible when prophets wrote about the coming Messiah hundreds or thousands of years before Jesus was even

born. One example of this is Psalm 22. This Psalm contains eleven prophecies of the Messiah's (Jesus') crucifixion experience.

Scripture is not just a compilation of stories. It is the Word of God. It is living and speaks to us (CCC 108).

Because Christ is present in the words of Scripture, we should approach it as an instrument to truly interact with and learn from God.

Challenge:

Read John 4. What do Jesus' actions and words reveal about God?

Objective #7:

Explore the contents of the Old and New Testaments and their connection to each other

Summary Points:

- Although the Old and New Testament were written at different times, they are strongly connected
- There is a continued story that starts in the Old Testament and ends in the New Testament

Reflection:

Think about a time when you made a promise, a truce or a pact with someone. Who did you do this with? It was probably someone close to you—someone you trusted enough to keep up their end of the deal. But why do we make truces or pacts with people? For one, it can be a sign of trust and respect. Throughout history, we see read stories in the Bible that show different agreements, or covenants, that God made with his children. Why do you think He did this? Even when humans failed to keep up their end of the deal, why do you think God stayed true to His?

Background Information/Questions:

The Bible is compiled of books, which are made up of chapters, which are made up of verses.

The Catholic Bible consists of 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 book of the New Testament.

The Old Testament was written before Jesus and the New Testament was written after Jesus.

There are connections between the Old and New Testament (See Objective #6 for more information). The Messianic Prophecies that were made in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament.

There are other ways the two Testaments are connected.

The Old Testament introduces us to our quest to understand God and live in a good relationship with Him. The Old Testament shows a history of covenants: “I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God” (Exodus 6:7).

A covenant is an agreement of love and responsibilities between God and His people.

Covenant: A solemn agreement between human beings or between God and a human being involving mutual commitments or guarantees. The Bible refers to God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses as leader of the chosen people, Israel. In the Old Testament or Covenant, God revealed his law through Moses and prepared his people for salvation through the prophets. In the New Testament or Covenant, Christ established a new and eternal covenant through his own sacrificial death and Resurrection. (CCC Glossary).

Challenge:

Find some more connections between the Old and New Testament. Where are there more prophecies of the coming Messiah?

Objective #8:

Investigate how to read/interpret Scriptures, including an awareness of the role of the Magisterium

Summary Points:

- Scripture is to be read prayerfully
- We need the guidance of the Church authority (Magisterium) to read and interpret Scripture properly
- There are important aspects to keep in mind when reading and interpreting Scripture

Reflection:

When you have a problem with your car, you can sometimes refer to the owner's manual. But other times the problem seems to be beyond your understanding of mechanics. So then you take your car to a professional mechanic so he/she can explain to you what the problem is and fix it. It is like that with Scripture as well. We can only read and interpret Scripture on our own to a certain point. Sometimes we need further explanation or clarity about the message God is trying to tell us in certain passages. This is where the Church comes in. The Church steers us in reading and interpreting Sacred Scripture so we can come to know the true meaning behind God's words.

Background Information/Questions:

Scripture is to be read prayerfully. As the Holy Spirit inspired the writers, it should also inspire the readers (YouCat #16).

God desires to speak to us through the Scriptures. Because it is the living Word of God, we can apply it to our lives today even though it has been written over the span of thousands of years.

Scripture should be considered in its entirety, not only a few passages (YouCat #16).

The Bible uses many literary genres to teach us about God. So, not everything in the Bible should be taken literally. The truth the stories contain, though, are true and contain deep meaning for us. (YouCat #15)

We are not expected to try to figure out what should be taken literally and what should not. It is the job of the teaching authority of the Church (the Magisterium) to ensure that interpretations are correct.

So how do we read and interpret Scripture? CCC #111-114)

Consider all of Scripture, not just a few specific passages.

Consider the Scripture as part of the "living tradition of the Church."

Consider the passage(s) as a part of God's whole plan of Revelation.

Challenge:

Open your Bible to the Gospels. Read a passage and look at the footnotes. How do the footnotes help to clarify how the passage should be interpreted?

Objective #9:

Discover the role of the Bible in the Liturgy (Mass)

Summary Points:

- The Mass is Scriptural
- Many of the important aspects of the Mass are taken from Scripture

Reflection:

If we were seeing a car for the first time, we would have no idea what it is, what its purpose is or how to use it. But once we have a car manual, we can begin to learn about the car's different functions and how it is to be properly used. This is how Scripture and the Mass work. If we walked into Mass for the first time, we would have no idea what was going on. But once we dive into Scripture and see that the important parts of the Mass are rooted in it, we can understand the Mass' purpose to its full extent.

Background Information/Questions:

Scripture plays a big role in the Mass. The Mass isn't just made up, it is Scriptural. There is a reason for what is said and done at each part of the Mass and many of the reasons come from the Bible (CCC 1100).

The Mass itself is a prayer (CCC 2662). It is Scripture and Tradition combined.

If we don't understand the reasoning behind what we do at Mass, it loses meaning. But the Mass becomes rich when we see there are reasons we sit, stand and kneel, that the incense symbolizes our prayers going up to God, that God wants to speak to us through the readings.

There are four Scripture readings in Mass. We learn lessons from these readings by listening to their words and how they are explained in the homily.

The four scripture readings at Mass

First Reading is primarily from Old Testament

Psalm is typically from the book of Psalms

Second reading is from the New Testament

Gospel is from one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).

Scripture is used during Mass in ways not as obvious as the readings too.

Some of the prayers and hymns are taken from Scripture. Some of these include the Gloria which comes from the Nativity scene in Luke's Gospel. Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. When we say "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed" before we receive the Eucharist is from Matthew 8:8.

Many of the Mass changes that happened recently happened because the new responses are a more accurate translation of the original translation of the Scripture they come from.

Other prayers that come from scripture include the Hail Mary (Luke 1:28,42).

Challenge: Go to USCCB.org and find today's Mass readings. Can you see how there is a common theme between them?

Objective #10:

Appreciate the importance of studying/praying with the Bible

Summary Points:

- Scripture is to be used as a source of prayer
- There are many different ways we can pray with Scripture including the Liturgy of Hours, Lectio Divina and the Rosary

Reflection:

Now that we have the car manual and understand the ins and outs of it, take it for a spin! We have been given Scripture to use as a source of getting to know God better, so use it to grow closer to Him in prayer!

Background Information/Questions:

Scripture is a tool we can use to learn about who God is. We can learn about God by learning attributes about Him but can also learn about Him by establishing a relationship with Him in prayer.

When we pray, we grow in relationship with God by having a conversation with Him. It allows our faith to shape and grow (CCC 2651). It is essential that we have the will to pray. Furthermore, we must learn how to pray (CCC 2650). What better way to grow in this relationship with God than by using the Word of God? Our Catechism says that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture (CCC 2653).

Praying with Scripture does not necessarily mean just sitting down and reading the Bible front to back. There are many different ways to pray with scripture. Sacred Scripture, the Mass, and the virtues of faith, hope and charity are sources of prayer (CCC 2662).

One way to pray with Scripture is the Liturgy of the Hours is the universal public prayer of the Church that all of our priests throughout the world pray every day. It encourages Priests to follow the calling to never cease praying. The Liturgy of the Hours is so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God (CCC1174).

Another form of prayer is Lectio Divina. When praying this way, you read a passage from the Bible and meditate on it by placing yourself in the scene. Read a short passage through once or twice and then create the scenery. Ask yourself what the setting looks like. What do you see, hear, and feel? What role are you playing in the story? For example, place yourself in the story of the Blind Man. As you hear Jesus' voice but cannot see him, what is he telling you? Do you trust Him? How do you feel after he cures your blindness? This way of praying with Scripture helps us to see what message God is trying to tell us in his Word.

Praying the Rosary is also a way of praying with Scripture. The Mysteries of the Rosary are all rooted in Scripture as well as the Hail Mary. By meditating on each Mystery we are reflecting on Jesus' life as the Word of God.

Challenge:

Try praying with Scripture in each of these ways this week. Listen to what God is trying to tell you through His Word. He wrote it for you!

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