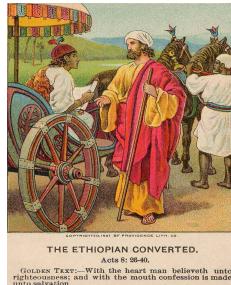




The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: The Study and Discernment of Scripture Part VI: The Senses of Scripture



Act 8 Philip Explains Scripture to the Ethiopian
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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Our panelists represent a rather broad background in catechesis gained in support of various parishes as well as a variety of age and spiritual interest groups. So, welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

During our last discussion, we began to look within the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the guidance it offers to us concerning the reading of scripture. As was pointed out in CCC: 133, we are clearly encouraged to spend time with scripture beyond what we hear at Mass. As we mentioned, we cannot fully understand the blessings of our faith without reading or hearing the inspired Word and discerning what God desires that we understand.

Today, we will look a little further in the Catechism as to its instruction concerning the “senses of scripture” and how this may influence our capability to understand the message of God to all the children of His creation.

(CCC: 115) According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

(**Question 1:** Just to make things simple, the Church tells us that 2 equals 4. The two are literal and spiritual, but because the spiritual can be subdivided into three senses, then, there are really four. That's simple, right? Anyway, starting with the two, how might we differentiate between the literal versus the spiritual senses of scripture?)

(CCC: 116) The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis [critical interpretation and explanation], following the rules of sound interpretation: “All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.”

(CCC: 117) The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God’s plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

(**Question 2:** Note, CCC: 116 relates a quote from Saint Thomas Aquinas that, “All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.” What might this statement mean and how might it influence our process of discernment?)

(CCC: 117) 1. The allegorical sense. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory and also of Christian Baptism.

[Merriam-Webster] allegory: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence. Synonym: parable.

(**Question 3:** As we look at the definition of allegory, we see it is a form which relates truth through symbolisms or generalizations as we might expect in the form of a parable. How might we recognize the presence of the allegorical sense?)

(cf. 1 Peter 3:18-22)

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. 19 In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, 20 who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. 21 This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

(Question 4: In this description of Christian suffering, we see a reference to the eight saved through water. What is the allegorical sense that we might observe here?)

(CCC: 117) 2. **The moral sense.** The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written “for our instruction.”

(cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13)

1 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, 2 and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 All ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ. 5 Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert.

6 These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. 7 And do not become idolaters, as some of them did, as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.” 8 Let us not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell within a single day. 9 Let us not test Christ as some of them did, and suffered death by serpents. 10 Do not grumble as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. 13 No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.

(Question 5: Here, we see an example of the moral sense as a reflection of obedience to God. In what ways do we perceive morality and how might we differentiate worldly morality (such as that of Political Correctness) from the true morality of God?)

(CCC: 117) 3. **The anagogical sense** (Greek: anagoge, “leading”). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

[Marriam-Webster] anagoge: interpretation of a word, passage, or text (as of Scripture or poetry) that finds beyond the literal, allegorical, and moral senses a fourth and ultimate spiritual or mystical sense.

(cf. Revelation 21:1-4)

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.”

(Question 6: The Catechism relates that the anagogical sense allows us to “view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance.” In the example of Revelation 21:1-4, what might we observe as the message to us concerning “eternal significance” and what importance might this sense have for us?)

(CCC: 118) A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses: The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

(Question 7: In this paragraph of the Catechism, we are provided a summary of the four senses. In what ways may we use these senses to discern the message Scripture holds for us?)

(CCC: 119) “It is the task of exegetes [scriptural interpreters] to work, according to these rules, toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God.” But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.

(Question 8: In this paragraph of the Catechism, we are told of the task of the expounders and interpreters of scripture [exegetes] to use the senses of scripture to enable our understanding of the meaning of Sacred Scripture to help the Church. Why is this important when we can read the Scriptures for ourselves and use these same rules to form our own understanding?)

(CCC: 131) “And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting font of spiritual life.” Hence “access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.”

(CCC: 132) “Therefore, the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too— pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place — is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture.”

(Question 9: As the Catechism concludes its presentation concerning Sacred Scripture, we are told that “access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.” As we have previously discussed, the Catholic Church is often criticized for not engaging the Bible and for prohibiting the laity from reading Scripture. In light of these paragraphs of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, what examples might we provide, from personal experience, as to how the Catholic Church provides access to Sacred Scripture?)

Quotes:

In all the sacred books, we should consider eternal truths that are taught, the facts that are narrated, the future events that are predicted, and the precepts or counsels that are given”

– Saint Augustine - *De Genesi ad litteram*

The author of Scripture is God, who is able to signify meaning with things as well as words, so some of the things described by the words of the Bible themselves point to other meanings. The historical or literal sense of Scripture is the obvious meaning, the things that the words directly point to, so when the Bible talks about rocks, the literal sense of its words are rocks: you know, those hard, stony things. But then there's also a threefold spiritual sense. When things in the Old Law signify things in the New Law, that's the allegorical sense: so when the Old Testament describes Moses hitting the rock and water flowing from it, that text refers literally to an actual rock, and allegorically to Jesus, from whom living water flows. Then when things symbolise what we ought to do, they are to be read in the moral sense: so when Jesus challenges anyone without sin to throw rocks at the woman caught in adultery, the moral or tropological sense is that we ought not to judge because we are sinful too. Finally, the anagogical sense is when the words of the Bible refer to our eternal glory, so when the Israelite prophets refer to the restoration of Jerusalem, the literal meaning is the actual city of Jerusalem, but the anagogical sense is the Kingdom of God.

– Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Article 10

Final Thoughts:

During the course of our discussion of the study and discernment of scripture, we pointed out the importance of assessing the context of meaning. Today, we outlined elements of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which leads us to also assess the sense of scripture from the perspective of not just the literal word, but also the spiritual forms which reveal the meaning of faith, morality, and destiny.

We are cautioned about going it alone in our attempts to comprehend what God intends for us to understand, but we are also encouraged to spend our time in abundance with the reading of scripture. The challenges may intimidate us, but if God is with us in our endeavor, why would we not avail ourselves of the wisdom and instruction of His Holy Word?

Next time, we will conclude our series concerning the study and discernment of scripture with a discussion concerning a means of reading scripture through the integration of reading, prayer, meditation, and contemplation. We hope you will be able to join us as we examine the means of sacred reading known as *Lectio Divina*.

Wrap Up: Again, an hour has flown by. We thank you for joining us.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Study and Discernment of Scripture – Part VII: Lectio Devina