

What Do I Need to Do the Work of This Program?

You need only four things:

#1) A good Bible.

In choosing a Bible to read or study, it is best to use a translation that is approved by the Church as being faithful in Spirit and truth to the ancient texts. ***The New Jerusalem Bible, The New American Bible, and The Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* are several good possibilities.**

Here at Sacred Heart Productions, we strive hard to present a Bible Study program that is written from within the mind and heart of the teaching Church, to whom has been entrusted not only divine Revelation, but also its authentic interpretation. Therefore, **we work from the fullness of the 73-book Sacred Canon that has been accepted and handed down to us from the earliest centuries of the Church**, relying on those translations which the Church presents to us as trustworthy in rendering the Word of God in its truest and fullest sense.

How do we know which Bibles are trustworthy? Certainly this is a subject too extensive for our brief introduction here, but there are a few things we should keep in mind in understanding the Church's role in approving translations of the Bible as trustworthy and good.

As we all know, the New Testament books were written by the apostles (and disciples or companions of the apostles) of Jesus Christ in the decades following His Ascension into heaven. But the Book we call *the Bible* did not exist in the 1st—or even the 2nd or 3rd—century. It certainly was not yet formed when the apostles were still alive, preaching the Gospel and recording their accounts of the life and death of Christ, or, in the case of St. Paul, writing his letters to the people of God. Why is this point important? Because **understanding how the Bible was formed helps us understand the importance of Sacred Tradition in transmitting and interpreting the Word of God.**

What is Sacred Tradition? Simply put, it is “the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church” (Catechism p. 901, 2nd ed.), and it existed from the very first days of the Church, through the *living* apostles who proclaimed the Gospel, just as it still exists today, through the living successors of the apostles, who proclaim exactly the same Word proclaimed two thousand years ago.

As most of us know, the Gospel was transmitted by the apostles in two ways: orally, and in writing, although their writings were not collected into a New Testament canon until much later. The point we are making here is an important one: that the relationship between Sacred Scripture (i.e., “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit”; cf. CCC 81) and Sacred Tradition (which “transmits in its entirety the Word of God . . . entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit”; cf. CCC 81) is a profoundly close relationship, and remains so to this day.

Think about it: the New Testament itself *demonstrates* the process of the Church’s living Tradition! Understanding this, one can see why the Church has never claimed to derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Bible alone. In fact, we must honor and accept “with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” both Scripture and Tradition (CCC 82).

Once we understand the role of the living teaching apostolic Church—that is to say, the bishops of each age—in faithfully preserving and transmitting divine Revelation, we can see why the Magisterium (the word means *office of teacher* or *teaching authority* and refers to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome) is constantly concerned about how fully and accurately the Word of God is rendered in the various Bible translations available. Not all Bible translations are equally good. Some, in fact, are poor in presenting faithfully and fully the mysteries of Christ and our salvation, in spite of the fact that the editors may well have had good intentions.

So, how do we know if a particular Bible is a good translation? Again, this is a subject too large for our introduction here, but there is one quick and simple way to find out if a translation has been approved by the Church: simply look for the Church’s *Nihil Obstat* (Latin for “nothing hinders,” meaning the book contains no doctrinal or moral error) and *Imprimatur* (Latin for “let it be printed,” meaning the Church has officially sanctioned and

approved the printing of the book), which you will find on the title page of the book (if such declarations have been granted).

Once we begin to understand the fact that God guides, enlightens and protects His sheep through the living teaching office of His Church, we see the gift of Sacred Tradition in a whole new light. In fact, we become eager to embrace exactly the same truths which the early Christians embraced under the teachings of the first apostles two thousand years ago. What a profound gift God bestows on us through the transmission of divine Revelation, as the Church continues to hand on, generation after generation, what God has revealed to us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

One final note: If you happen to discover that the Bible you have been using up till now is less-than-adequate, don't be upset by this. Know that God is gracious and generous whenever we approach Him in faith, hope and love, open to the truths which He reveals. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that you are reading this page right now. God is always drawing us to Himself, for He is infinitely good.

#2) A copy of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (indicated by CCC in the lessons; Catechism references are by *paragraph* numbers, *not by page* numbers).

This book is an immensely important resource to all Christians for the concise summary it presents of the whole two-thousand-year Tradition of the Church.

The Catechism is an eloquent, easy-to-understand summary of divine Revelation, that is, of God's plan revealed in the order of creation and redemption. In this one volume, the Church presents and explains the essential truths of our Christian faith, making important connections among the mysteries of divine Revelation as they are fulfilled in the Person of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tm 2:5).

In order to appreciate the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, one must appreciate the importance of Sacred Tradition in preserving, expounding and faithfully handing on the Word of God. If we know Sacred Tradition, we will better understand Sacred Scripture; and if we better understand Sacred Scripture, we will also understand the beauty and power of

Sacred Tradition. Though distinct, these two modes of transmission of the Word of God are bound so closely together that they “form one thing”: just as their source and goal are one and the same, so also is their joint work to “make present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own ‘always, to the close of the age’” (CCC 80; cf. Mt 28:20).

By knowing Sacred Tradition, we are guided, enlightened, confirmed and corrected as to the truths of our faith. As you will experience time and again while doing the work of the lessons, the teaching voice of the Church within the pages of the Catechism greatly assists us in making important connections among the truths of divine Revelation and in helping us understand the mysteries of Christ *and our participation in them* as part of God’s plan for our salvation.

Copies of the Catechism can be purchased in most bookstores, in some Catholic parish offices, and also online.

#3) The lessons.

The lessons, which are available on this website, will guide you in the work of the program.

Begin by choosing which part of the program you would like to do. Each part or series has a set of lessons you can print out for your convenience. It is these lessons which will guide you through the Bible Study program in a simple and easy-to-follow manner, providing an assigned text for you to read and questions to answer in connection with the text.

The lessons have short lists of readings (from throughout the Old and New Testament and the Catechism) to help you answer the questions. Occasionally you will encounter a question that doesn’t have secondary readings. These questions are designed to make the reader more aware of the sequence of events presented, or the details or language of the text.

Each lesson has an accompanying one-hour lecture. These videos can be viewed for free here on our website or purchased through our online bookstore. Summary answers to the

questions are also available in book form. These study guides can be purchased in our bookstore as well.

(See also: *Where Do I Find the Answers to the Questions?*)

#4) An open mind and willing heart.

The Holy Spirit enlightens and guides into all truth every person who listens attentively, faithfully, and humbly to God's Word.

God never stops working to draw us into a deeper relationship with Him, so that He can strengthen, heal and love us into wholeness in this life in preparation for the life to come. But **God never forces us** to respond, even though He grants every possible grace, that we might grow in true knowledge and freedom. *Grace is necessary* in order to grow in love and knowledge of God—in *holiness*—and God will not fail to give us all that is needed in order to reach the heights of holiness for which He destines us. We have only to respond to His invitation, which is both *the desire in our heart* AND *the labor of love we undertake in embracing His Word in Its fullness*. Our perseverance, in spite of setbacks or struggles, will not go unrewarded.

As Christ says of the seed sown in rich soil: “There are those who have been sown in rich soil; they hear the word and accept it and yield a harvest, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. . . . Let him who has ears to hear me, hear!” (Mk 4:20,23).