**Defending the Faith**

Lesson Plan 2: My Words Will Never Pass Away

*“**Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.* *In the same way, when you see all these things, know that he is near, at the gates.* *Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”*

*Matthew 24:32-35*

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You give us the Church to guide us to salvation. May we always represent Your Church to other with great love and fidelity. May we always be a sign of Your love in the world so that we may lead others to knowledge of you and in service to the Gospel. We pray for those that are separated from the Church out of obstinacy or a lack of knowledge; that they may come to partake of the truth of Your Church and the Eucharist which sustains her. We ask this through Your most holy Name. Amen.

1. Review (5 min)

-Where does the Church come from? Why does Jesus give us the Church? Who does Jesus make the head of the Church? What is his real name and what is it changed to? What does the name “Peter” mean? What do we call followers of Jesus? What do we call those 12 men chosen by Jesus? What does this word mean? What is the only church that can trace itself back to Jesus? Peter is the first what? His successors are the bishops of what city? What is a Protestant?

2. Introductory Discussion (5-10 min)

-Have any of you had a discussion with non-Catholic friends about something we believe as Catholics that they don’t?

-Sometimes we may find ourselves asked the question, “where does it say that in the Bible.”

-This is a fundamental point between Catholics and Protestants. It is the source of a great division between Catholics and Protestants.

-This class will delve into this topic and try to explain why not everything the Church teaches is found in the pages of the Bible.

3. Sola Scriptura? (10-15 min)

-Protestants are all at some level followers of Martin Luther who began the Protestant Revolt in the 16th century.

-Luther was a Catholic priest that eventually turned on the Catholic Church.

-Luther lived at a time of corruption within the Church. Some of its priests, bishops and occasionally the pope were not men concerned with Jesus or the welfare of the Church. Instead they were interested in power and wealth.

-Luther saw this and was greatly troubled. He came up with an idea that turned Christianity upside down. He believed that the Church was not necessary for salvation-that it didn’t come to us from Jesus for our salvation. Luther abandoned the Church and her teachings.

-He devised a different and new method that went contrary to 1500 years of Christian teaching. He believed that knowledge of salvation could be attained by each person through the Bible alone.

-The Catholic position is that the Bible is the work of the Church and that the two stand together to guide us to heaven. Luther divorced the Bible from the Church. He elected the Bible alone. In Latin this is referred to as “sola scriptura” or “Scripture alone.”

-Over time certain teachings which are not expressly stated in the Bible but that every Christian had believed for 1500 years were cast out by our Protestant brothers and sisters. Teachings on Mary, purgatory, the Saints and many others were abandoned by Protestants.

-Due to the fact that there is not a single interpretive body in Protestantism each individual member can interpret the Bible by himself/herself. This led to a misinterpretation of other parts of the Bible which abolished other teachings such as the Eucharist, confession, holy orders and authority.

4. Scripture and Tradition (5-10 min)

-The Protestant point of view abolishes the need for a church. In fact, it states that a church can keep lead us away from Jesus.

-The Catholic point of view is that the Bible is the written Word of God. We believe just as strongly as our Protestant brothers and sisters that the Bible is an essential tool for attaining salvation. We both believe that the Bible is the unerring Word of God.

-However, we also believe that the Word of God cannot be interpreted by each individual as it is meant to be.

-The Catholic position is that God gives us His written Word via the Bible but also gives us His living Word through the Church. The Bible regulates and gives authority to the church and the Church wrote and explains the Bible.

-If they believe in Scripture alone, we believe in Scripture and Tradition.

-As we talked about last time, we believe Jesus gave us the Church to guide us to salvation. The Church exists because Jesus gives to His Church the fullness of truth. Some of those truths were eventually written down and form the pages of the Bible. However, not everything was written down. These are the teachings that the Church continues to believe. We call these teachings “tradition” because they are handed down from one generation to another.

-As Catholics, we believe that there are two ways God communicates to us: 1. Through the pages of Scripture and 2. Through the Church. These two sources of information on God form what we call “**the deposit of faith**.” This is the term used for the beliefs and teachings that Jesus intended His followers to accept as true.

-**Draw the chart below on the board.** Note that Protestants reject what we have to say about the part on the right.

Scripture

Tradition

2. Sacred Tradition- These are the teachings passed on from Jesus to the apostles that are not necessarily in Scripture but have been believed by Christians since the earliest days of the Church. These truths are protected from error by the Holy Spirit which guides the Church.

1. Sacred Scripture- Through the Scriptures God reveals Himself. He gives us laws and commandments so that we know what pleases God and what is sinful. The Scriptures tell us things about God that we would not be able to figure out on our own.

The Deposit of Faith

5. Sola Scriptura vs. Scripture and Tradition (25-35 min)

-In order to evaluate the credibility of both sides of the argument we will use only the part that both sides agree on: the Bible. Later on we will develop this logically but for the time being we will use only the Bible to decide which side is correct. **Review some of the texts below. Read the verses from the Bible and a short explanation is given to help clarify the point each verse is making. Definitely use the ones that are BOLD.**

**ARGUMENTS FROM SCRIPTURE**

-Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15 - those that preached the Gospel to all creation but did not write the Gospel were not less obedient to Jesus, or their teachings less important.

-Matt. 28:20 - "observe ALL I have commanded," but, as we see in John 20:30; 21:25, not ALL Jesus taught is in Scripture. So there must be things outside of Scripture that we must observe. This disproves "Bible alone" theology.

-Mark 16:15 - Jesus commands the apostles to "preach," not write, and only three apostles wrote. The others who did not write were not less faithful to Jesus, because Jesus gave them no directive to write. There is no evidence in the Bible or elsewhere that Jesus intended the Bible to be sole authority of the Christian faith.

-Luke 1:1-4 - Luke acknowledges that the faithful have already received the teachings of Christ, and is writing his Gospel only so that they "realize the certainty of the teachings you have received." Luke writes to verify the oral tradition they already received.

-John 20:30; 21:25 - **Jesus did many other things not written in the Scriptures. These have been preserved through the oral apostolic tradition and they are equally a part of the Deposit of Faith.**

-Acts 8:30-31; Heb. 5:12 - these verses show that we need help in interpreting the Scriptures. We cannot interpret them infallibly on our own. We need divinely appointed leadership within the Church to teach us.

-Acts 15:1-14 – Peter resolves the Church’s first doctrinal issue regarding circumcision without referring to Scriptures.

-Acts 17:28 – Paul quotes the writings of the pagan poets when he taught at the Aeropagus. Thus, Paul appeals to sources outside of Scripture to teach about God.

-**1 Cor. 5:9-11 - this verse shows that a prior letter written to Corinth is equally authoritative but not part of the New Testament canon. Paul is again appealing to a source outside of Scripture to teach the Corinthians. This disproves Scripture alone.**

-1 Cor. 11:2 - Paul commends the faithful to obey apostolic tradition, and not Scripture alone.

-Phil. 4:9 - **Paul says that what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do. There is nothing ever about obeying Scripture alone.**

-Col. 4:16 - this verse shows that a prior letter written to Laodicea is equally authoritative but not part of the New Testament canon. Paul once again appeals to a source outside of the Bible to teach about the Word of God.

-1 Thess. 2:13 – **Paul says, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us..” How can the Bible be teaching first century Christians that only the Bible is their infallible source of teaching if, at the same time, oral revelation was being given to them as well? Protestants can’t claim that there is one authority (Bible) while allowing two sources of authority (Bible and oral revelation).**

-1 Thess. 3:10 - Paul wants to see the Thessalonians face to face and supply what is lacking. His letter is not enough.

-2 Thess. 2:14 - Paul says that God has called us "through our Gospel." What is the fullness of the Gospel?

-**2 Thess. 2:15 - the fullness of the Gospel is the apostolic tradition which includes either teaching by word of mouth or by letter. Scripture does not say "letter alone." The Catholic Church has the fullness of the Christian faith through its rich traditions of Scripture, oral tradition and teaching authority (or Magisterium).**

-2 Thess 3:6 - Paul instructs us to obey apostolic tradition. There is no instruction in the Scriptures about obeying the Bible alone (the word "Bible" is not even in the Bible).

-1 Tim. 3:14-15 - Paul prefers to speak and not write, and is writing only in the event that he is delayed and cannot be with Timothy.

-2 Tim. 2:2 - Paul says apostolic tradition is passed on to future generations, but he says nothing about all apostolic traditions being eventually committed to the Bible.

-2 Tim. 3:14 - continue in what you have learned and believed knowing from whom you learned it. Again, this refers to tradition which is found outside of the Bible.

-James 4:5 - James even appeals to Scripture outside of the Old Testament canon ("He yearns jealously over the spirit which He has made...")

-2 Peter 1:20 - interpreting Scripture is not a matter of one's own private interpretation. Therefore, it must be a matter of "public" interpretation of the Church. The Divine Word needs a Divine Interpreter. Private judgment leads to divisions, and this is why there are 30,000 different Protestant denominations.

-2 Peter 3:15-16 - Peter says Paul's letters are inspired, but not all his letters are in the New Testament canon. See, for example, 1 Cor. 5:9-10; Col. 4:16. Also, Peter's use of the word "ignorant" means unschooled, which presupposes the requirement of oral apostolic instruction that comes from the Church.

-2 Peter 3:16 - the Scriptures are difficult to understand and can be distorted by the ignorant to their destruction. God did not guarantee the Holy Spirit would lead each of us to infallibly interpret the Scriptures. But this is what Protestants must argue in order to support their doctrine of sola Scriptura. History and countless divisions in Protestantism disprove it.

-The New Testament bears constant witness to the Catholic position. It isn’t just the Bible but the living oral teachings (tradition) of the Church.

-2 Thessalonians 2:15 is one of the great verses for us to understand this point. Paul says to the Christians in Thessalonica to hold fast to the traditions they were taught by word of mouth or by letter. Here Paul is encapsulated the Catholic view that both Scripture (letter) and tradition are necessary for Christians to follow.

-The Bible also tells us that after Jesus rose from the dead that He stayed and taught His apostles for 40 days. Jesus spent these 40 days with the apostles teaching them about what had happened and breaking open the Scriptures (Old Testament). None of these teachings are found anywhere in the Bible. No information other than the length of time is mentioned in the Bible. We can guess that what Jesus had to say was important but none of this is captured in the Gospels, in the Acts of the Apostles or the New Testament letters. It is handed on through the Church-tradition.

**LOGICAL ARGUMENTS**

-Let us now use logic to understand the problems with the Protestant position.

-Did Christians exist before the last book of the New Testament was written? Of course. Jesus died around 33 AD. The last book of the New Testament was written around 100 AD and these books weren’t compiled into the Bible for another 150 years. That means that there certainly were Christians before the Bible because the Church also carries the Word of God and was responsible for bringing it to the faithful.

-The earliest Christians didn’t look to a book for information about God, they went to the Church to hear the apostles. **Acts 2:42** tells us that the earliest Christians devoted themselves to following the teaching of the apostles, to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist) and to prayer.

-Nowhere in the entire Bible does it claim that Christian were to spend their time reading the Bible.

-Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the Bible is the only source for information about God; in fact, it says the opposite.

-Nowhere in the Bible do we have stories of great students of the Bible, but we do have stories of great preachers such as John the Baptist, Peter and Stephen who spread allegiance to Christ. Tradition is everywhere in Scripture but study of Scripture is nowhere in the Bible.

-Protestants argue in favor of Scripture alone but there is a problem with this. The Bible never says what books should be in the Bible. For example, there are 4 Gospels that tell us the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Those were not the only 4 Gospels written however. This is a list of less than half of the other

Gospels: Gospel of Thomas

Gospel of Truth

Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians

Gospel of Nicodemus (aka the "Acts of Pilate")

Gospel of Barnabas

Gospel of Gamaliel

Gospel of the Nativity of Mary

Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew

Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Infancy Gospel of James

Arabic Infancy Gospel

Syriac Gospel of the Boyhood of our Lord Jesus

Gospel of Judas

Gospel of Peter

Gospel of Mary

Gospel of Philip

Dialogue of the Saviour

Papyrus Egerton

Gospel of Eve

Fayyum Fragment

Gospel of Mani

Oxyrhynchus Gospels

Gospel of the Saviour (a a Unknown Berlin gospel)

Gospel of the Twelve

Gospel of the Ebionites

Gospel of the Egyptians

Gospel of the Hebrews

Secret Gospel of Mark

-How do we decide which Gospels should be in the Bible? According to Protestants we can only know these things through the Bible. Do we see the problem? We look to the Bible to tell us what should be in the Bible but we can’t because the Bible isn’t the Bible until there are books in it. Furthermore, none of the books in the Bible tell us what books should be in the Bible.

-When we look historically at how the earliest Christians put together the Bible we encounter the Catholic point of view. We have already noted that the Bible doesn’t tell us what books should be in the Bible, so how did they get in there?

-The bishops (*ie*: the Church) formed the list of books that were viewed as inspired by the Holy Spirit. They based their decision on the traditions of the earliest Christians. The tradition stated that the 4 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were the oldest and could be tied to the apostles. Keep in mind that none of these 4 say “I am Scripture” or “I should be in the Bible,” and no other part of the Bible tells us they should be in there. It is a tradition of the early Church that these 4 should and must be seen as Scripture.

-So sola scriptura is by necessity false. It doesn’t work. The Bible cannot exist without the Church that chose the books and comprised the “**canon**” or list of books within the Bible.

-When we think about the Christian faith we all agree on a number of things. We all believe in the Trinity and in the Incarnation (God becoming man) yet these words are not in the Bible. How can Protestants claim to believe in the Bible alone and also accept teachings that are not in the Bible as the core beliefs?

- Fallible list of Infallible books

1. All Protestants agree that the Bible is the perfect Word of God.

2. Protestants also reject the authority of the Catholic Church.

3. The Catholic Church via her bishops were the ones that finally decided what books would

be included in the canon of the Bible.

4. Therefore, Protestants believe in the Bible that the Church they reject compiled.

5. Protestants declare the Bible as the infallible Word of God but reject the authority that put

the Word of God together. This means that Protestants believe the books are perfect

because they are in the Bible but isn’t the Bible’s list to be questioned since the Church that

compiled it could have been wrong?

**PERSONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE**

-We already discussed that Luther believed that each person could read and interpret the Bible for themselves without an authoritative church. Let’s examine that premise to see if that makes sense.

-First, let’s **read Matthew 26:26-28**. You might read that part about the Last Supper and think, “Jesus is speaking of a symbol-that He will be broken like bread.” Another of you might think, “He is saying that we need to eat His Body and drink His Blood and we have to do it regularly.”

-Which one of you is right? You are each interpreting Scripture but in completely different ways. One sees this as symbol and should be taken as such but one of you sees this literally. How do we tell who is right? Can both be right?

-Of course you can’t both be right. We can’t have two people give the opposite answer and both be right. We can’t have two people give two different answer for 2+2 and still be right. It is logically impossible.

-So how do we determine who is right? How do we find the truth of Scripture? Is it really up to me or you to determine what this means all on my own. Do I have the knowledge and experience to get it all right all the time? Does anyone?

-It is for this reason that there are so many different kinds of Protestants. Once you reject the Church as the final authority we have no other authority but ourselves. Which means when we disagree with something taught by our church we just leave and start a different one, and when someone disagrees with that church; they leave and start a different one. This has continued for 500 years.

-It is for this reason that the Bible tells us not to interpret Scripture on our own. **Read 2 Peter 1:20**. Here we have conclusive evidence from the Bible that contradicts the position of Protestants. So if they were truly “sola scriptura” wouldn’t they reject the notion of individual interpretation of Scripture? Furthermore, if no one can interpret Scripture, who can? The answer here is the Church which is bigger than any individual.

-We can also look at personal interpretation logically. God gives us His perfect written Word in the Bible. What good is the perfect written Word of God if it is put into the hands of individuals who are incapable of interpreting it perfectly?

-If the perfect Word of God is to be truly effective, it needs a perfect teacher. The Church is that perfect teacher given to us by Christ. So Scripture and tradition just aren’t useful for one another; they are necessary.

6. Conclusion (2 min)

-In conclusion we have seen how the Catholic position from a Biblical and logical perspective is correct.

-Sola Scriptura is impossible since the Bible is a work of tradition and it was compiled by tradition. The position of the Church is as the St. Paul says “word of mouth and by letter.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in Your great love You give us Your only begotten Son to lead us on the path of everlasting life. Give to us, Merciful Father, minds that seek to know You above all things; hearts that desire to love you more than all things and wills yearning to follow You more than all things. Shower us with Your grace so that we may always have a strong defense against sin and temptation and remain faithful to You. We ask Your blessings on those who are not part of Your Church, those deceived by erroneous opinions and those too prideful to submit to Your truths; that they may all be guided to Your fold and come to believe in Your Name. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.