

## A Few Things about “Revelation”

In the Gospel for weekday Mass this past Wednesday, we hear our Lord tell the Apostles at the Last Supper that the “Spirit of truth” will come and guide them to all truth. Our Lord is speaking here about “Revelation.” Revelation refers, principally, to God telling man about Himself, about God. St Thomas Aquinas asks the question of why God reveals Himself to us, or what does that mean, what does it tell us? He points out that people don’t generally reveal themselves to strangers; they don’t go up to someone they don’t even know and start telling them about their innermost thoughts, struggles, desires, and so on. If someone did do that with you, you’d probably look at your watch and say: boy, look at what time it is, I gotta go! Spouses often tell each other things – thoughts, feelings, beliefs, struggles, aspirations, and so on – that they’ve never told anyone else. What does this tell us? It tells us that when someone speaks to us about their very interior life it is an act of deep friendship and it also brings about friendship; the very act itself also deepens the friendship. Aquinas says the same is true for God. God revealing His own interior life to us and what He is like is an invitation to deep, personal friendship. There are numerous times in the Gospel where our Lord speaks in parables. Only those who really desire friendship with God, and thus are willing to set themselves aside, are able to understand them or even care about them; the others don’t understand and don’t care to.

A little more needs to be said about what is meant, and not meant, by the word Revelation. The last book of the Bible is called “Revelation” or “The Apocalypse” (which means “unveiling”). The reason it’s called that is because one of the things that the Book of Revelation talks about is God’s “final unveiling” of Himself at the end of the world. But in general, and in this article, the word Revelation does not just mean the last book of the Bible. It refers to *all* that God has revealed to man directly through the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament, and then finally through our Lord who is the fullness of Revelation. Revelation is everything that is contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Notice the use of the word ‘directly’ – Revelation refers to everything that God has revealed *directly*. The reason for using the word ‘directly’ is because all of creation bears some imprint of God, and thus there is a certain ‘natural revelation.’ Our Lord Himself capitalizes on this numerous times by using analogies from created things – e.g., sheep and shepherd. But when people speak of Revelation (or the Revelation), they are not generally talking about ‘natural revelation’ but rather the “direct” Revelation that God has made through the prophets and His Son = God speaking to us directly about Himself.

Revelation, then, is all that God has told us directly about Himself. It is everything contained in Scripture and Tradition. But it may seem that that doesn’t quite cover it. Isn’t much of Scripture God telling us how we are to be, rather than God telling us about Himself? It is, of course, the case that there is much in Revelation about God telling us what we are to be like but man was created in the image and likeness of God. So when our Lord tells us: be this way and not that way or do this and not that, it is because that’s the way He is and if we do what He tells us not to do, it makes us unlike Him and thus unlike the way we are meant to be – it makes like an arm that is broken. Take the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment for example, which says to be truthful, honest. The reason God tells us that is because He is truth and if we are dishonest or untruthful, it makes us unlike Him and thus unlike what we are meant to be. So yes, it is most certainly (and even obviously) true that our Lord is telling us how to be and not to be in Revelation, but this too is revealing who He is.

An important question about Revelation, one that is prompted somewhat by last Wednesday’s Gospel, is: has Revelation ended, or is it ongoing? Is God still revealing Himself or is it complete? Revelation, in fact, ended with the death of the last Apostle. All that God has to say to us, He has said. There will be no new “revelation” before the end of time. This is part of what is meant by: Jesus is the fullness of Revelation. There is nothing more that we need for salvation, there will be nothing more revealed before the end of time. *But...* that does not mean that our understanding of what He has revealed cannot or will not continue to increase; that can, and hopefully will, continue until the end of time. This is what our Lord touches on in the Gospel from last Wednesday – the Spirit of Truth will come...understanding will increase. But then our Lord goes on to say: He will take from what is mine – our Lord is the fullness of God’s revelation, it is complete.

Revelation ending with the death of the last Apostle probably prompts a whole slew of new questions, one of which is: why the death of the last Apostle? If Jesus is the fullness of Revelation, then why didn’t it end with,

say, the Ascension? Our Lord so impressed Himself upon the Apostles that they actually carried the fullness of Revelation within themselves. This was necessary for the start of the Church. First of all, the New Testament was not, of course, written yet. The Apostles could not turn to the New Testament and say: what did our Lord say! They were (in effect) the human authors of the New Testament. It was necessary that they carry the fullness of Revelation within themselves so that people could know what our Lord meant and willed. A simple example of this is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We read (now) in the Gospels our Lord's words: Do this in memory of Me. Does this mean offer Mass, to continue His presence here on earth in form of bread and wine? The way that the Church knows that the answer to that question is yes, is because that's what the Apostles did, as indicated by ancient documents. This is what gave rise to Sacred Tradition – those things that the Apostles said (taught orally) and did (practices) in regard to the faith that revealed what our Lord intended and intends. Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture both contain the fullness of Revelation, but some things are more explicit in one than the other. Take baptism for example. Should babies be baptized? This was the practice from the beginning (part of Sacred Tradition) so yes. It is alluded to in Scripture, for example when Paul baptized entire households – but it is more explicit in Sacred Tradition. The two go together, complimenting one another.

Revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle. Another question this might prompt is: what about “private revelations” – the apparitions of our Lord and our Holy Mother to many throughout the centuries, for example in Fatima. God does not reveal anything new in these apparitions, certainly nothing new in regard to what is needed for our salvation. When there is a “message for the world,” it is sometimes a warning to turn back from evil paths that have been taken; or, it is drawing attention to something that has already been revealed but is especially important in that given time. An example would be the Divine Mercy messages given to the world through St Faustina. Divine Mercy is not something new, it was revealed from the beginning, but it is something that our Lord now wants to draw particular attention to in our times.

Revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle, therefore nothing new can be, or will be, added to it. But the Church has declared new dogmas throughout her 2,000 year history. Is that not adding to Revelation? When the Church declares a dogma what she is doing is taking what has always been there from the beginning – and making it explicit. The Assumption, for example, had been held to be true since the beginning but it had never been formally declared by the Church until 1950. Dogmas/doctrine are declared for the good of the faithful, often times – not always but often – in response to a false teaching. Everybody knew from the beginning, for example, that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. Then in the 1,000's along came a guy called Berengarius who denied this reality and his false claims started catching on. The Church then formally declared, for the good of the faithful, that the Eucharist is the person of Jesus.

“It” was held to be true from the beginning. How do you know? This brings out the importance of the Church Fathers, those good teachers of the faith from the early Church. Some of the Church Fathers would eventually write about these various things that were known to be true from the beginning. One of the things the Church will do, then, when declaring a new dogma is examine the writings of the Fathers to see if this was generally held to be true amongst them. So, for example, when Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption, one of the things he would have done is have people examine the writings of the Fathers to see if this was generally held among the Fathers. If not, there would be no dogma declared – a dogma means it is something revealed by God and thus had to be held by the faithful from the beginning, since Revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle.

Why talk about these things? Well what comes to mind as you read and think about these things? Hopefully one of the things is that there *is* a firm, immovable rock bed upon which the teachings of the Church reside. As people of faith look out into the world today what they often see are moral problems. That is true but morality rests upon dogma. If dogma goes, morals go. If things like the divinity and thus authority of Christ, the teaching authority of the Church, and the inerrancy of Scripture go, then there is no basis for moral claims. In fact, this is what has happened. So one of the “statements” of this little write-up is simply that Revelation and what the Church teaches definitively is not man-made, it is not opinion, it is real, it is well-founded, it comes from the All-Powerful One, and thus it is serious. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.