

Interpretation of Scripture

When interpreting Scripture, we should be attentive to what God wanted to reveal through the authors for our salvation. We need to see Scripture as a unified whole with Jesus Christ at the center. We must also read Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church, so that we may come to grasp a true interpretation of the Scriptures. The task of giving an authoritative interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted to the Magisterium. Last, we need to remember and recognize that there is a coherence of the truths of faith within Scripture (cf. CCC, nos. 112-114).

The Church recognizes two senses of Scripture, the literal and the spiritual. In probing the literal meaning of the texts, it is necessary to determine their literary form, such as history, hymns, wisdom sayings, poetry, parable, or other forms of figurative language. “The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis [the process scholars use to determine the meaning of the text], following the rules of sound interpretation: ‘All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal’” (CCC, no. 116, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 1, 10).

The spiritual senses of Sacred Scripture derive from the unity of God’s plan of salvation. The text of Scripture discloses God’s plan. The realities and events

of which it speaks can also be signs of the divine plan. There are three spiritual senses of Scripture:

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 over sin and also of Christian Baptism.
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” (1 Cor 10:11).
3. The *anagogical sense*. . . . 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. (CCC, no. 117)

The Church’s Scripture scholars are expected to work according to these principles to develop a better understanding of Scripture for God’s people. Interpretation of Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Magisterium, which exercises the divine commission to hold fast to and to interpret authoritatively God’s Word.