

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 14

Preserve, deepen and transmit Revelation

ECCLESIA

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Sunday Catechism



The fourteenth lesson today examines the methods and forms the Magisterium of the Church is expressed.

We know that the Magisterium exists to preserve Revelation, to deepen it and transmit it faithfully and not to fill gaps in Revelation or to find a *modus vivendi* between faith and contemporary culture.

This is exactly the meaning of Magisterium: to preserve, deepen and transmit Revelation.

To do so, the Magisterium takes certain forms and adopts precise methods to express itself.

There are two MAIN FORMS :

- the Ordinary or authentic Magisterium

- the Extraordinary Magisterium

When we speak of **ORDINARY OR AUTHENTIC MAGISTERIUM**, we mean precisely the usual, customary way in which the pastors of the Church, including the Bishop of Rome, teach, without explicitly aiming to bind the faith of Catholics. In other words, it is the "usual" way pastors of the Church exercise their faculty to teach. If this teaching includes something that has already been defined by the Church, then that Ordinary Magisterium includes content which is binding, not so much for the form, but because through the Ordinary Magisterium the pastors recall the teachings of the Church (correctly). They might recall the Council of Trent, articles of the Creed, or other texts ... but something that clearly refers to the accepted teachings of the Church.

Another form of Magisterium is **THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM**; this refers to an extraordinary way, therefore out of the ordinary, that the Church pronounces and instructs. What are these extraordinary forms? This would be, for example, an Ecumenical Council or a pronouncement by the Supreme Pontiff *ex cathedra*, that is, when the Pontiff expressly intends to bind the faith of the Church, that is all the faithful, to a dogmatic and solemn declaration. An example of this happened with the pronouncement of the Immaculate Conception or the dogma of the Assumption of Mary in body and soul.

The Magisterium is expressed also in TWO MODES:

- **Solemn**

- **Non-solemn**

It is important to remember the modes do not overlap with the Ordinary and Extraordinary forms; an explanation of the modes follows.

SOLEMN. A solemn declaration is identifiable for the entire apparatus that accompanies it. In the case of a council it is evident; in the case of an ex cathedra pronouncement there is an extraordinary and solemn way of proceeding and pronouncing.

The Magisterium, which could be defined in a **NON-SOLEMN** mode, nevertheless falls within a certain extraordinary form of the Magisterium, because it intends, even if in a non-solemn mode, to bind the faith of the faithful. In this case it is also called the **Universal** Why is it important to distinguish the Ordinary or authentic Magisterium and the Universal Ordinary Magisterium which instead falls within the Extraordinary but not solemn Magisterium?

This is because the Universal Ordinary Magisterium intends to explicitly bind the faith of believers to something. An example of this could be the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* of 1994, in which John Paul II, in number 4, while not exercising a solemn Magisterium, intends to bind the faith of all Church believers:

"In order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful."

That is an example of how the Magisterium can be extraordinary, but not solemn and therefore binds the faith of all believers.

Why are these analysed differences important?

Because the Magisterium of the Church is always assisted by the Holy Spirit, but this assistance varies, it is not always in the same way.

It is now important to focus on the topic of INFALLIBILITY.

The assistance that the Holy Spirit gives to the Church has different modalities and it's possible to say that there is an *in credendo* underlying infallibility in the Church:

What does "**INFALLIBILITY IN CREDENDO**" mean?

It means that as the Church is assisted by the Holy Spirit, in believing, or when all the faithful confess the faith or the articles of faith, it cannot be wrong. This is the reason, for example, why during the Arian crisis considerable confusion was found in the faith of the pastors but much less in the faith of believers. They definitely did not try to dissect questions of theological terminology, but substantially adhered to the divinity of Christ and to his consubstantiality with the Father.

At the service of this "infallibility *in credendo*" there is the "INFALLIBILITY *IN DOCENDO*", with its important nuances. First of all, the Roman Pontiff, and he alone, enjoys this infallibility *in docendo*, without requiring the other bishops' consent. This is the so-called infallibility of the Pope *ex cathedra*, which was defined by Pastor Aeternus, by Vatican Council I, in 1870 (chapter 4). It is a very important text because it explains clearly the theme of infallibility.

"When the Roman Pontiff speaks EX CATHEDRA, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions by the Roman Pontiff are by themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable."

This means, it is a prerogative of the Pope himself and is not derived from the consent of the Church, but at the same time it is a function of the Church and of her infallibility. The conditions for this infallibility are:

- **that the Pope pronounces himself in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority;**
- **that he defines and therefore intends to define a doctrine in matters of faith and morals;**
- **that he intends to affirm that it must be held by the whole Church**

Benedict XVI, during the Holy Mass of the possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome, on May 7, 2005, taught as follows:

"The power of teaching in the Church involves a commitment to the service of obedience to the faith. The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the Pope's ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God's Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism."

The infallibility of the Magisterium, however, is not only this, but there is an infallibility of the so-called Universal Ordinary Magisterium and of the Extraordinary one, which enjoys such infallibility when it proposes to believe the truths of faith as **divinely revealed**.

What does this mean?

There must be the explicit will to define a datum of Revelation; not everything in Magisterium texts is binding in the same way: it is necessary to study the texts.

Everything that aims to affirm belief as divinely revealed implies that any believer who disagrees is formally guilty of "heresy".

There are also some **pronouncements** that must be kept by the faithful, even though they are not expressly specified in divine Revelation, but are nevertheless connected to it. These too must be kept by the faithful, who otherwise would commit an "error of faith".

Finally, we have the **teaching of the authentic Magisterium** which, as such, is not infallible, but being authentic it requires the religious obedience of the will and the intellect, always within the proper object of the Magisterium, namely faith and morality or truths strictly connected with these divinely revealed elements and therefore explicitly present in Revelation.