

# Vatican II: 50 Years Later

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- St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the largest church in the world and the burial place of the Apostle St. Peter, gradually filled to capacity as a seemingly endless procession of bishops in white vestments entered its cavernous halls.
  - It was October 11, 1962, the opening day of the Second Vatican Council.
  - The two thousand Council Fathers that were steadily filing in had been called by Pope John XXIII from every corner of the world:
    - The Council Fathers were bishops and heads of Religious Orders from around the globe.
    - There were representatives from North America, Central America, South America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and, of course, Europe.
    - Some bishops beamed with anticipation as they entered, wondering what to expect from this historic event.
    - Others no doubt wondered how long they would be away from their home dioceses and whether this gathering would really be worth the effort and travel expenses.
    - Few, I imagine, could predict the impact that this Council would have on the future of the Catholic Church.
- Today we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council, and we have the opportunity to better understand what this Council was all about and what it means for us today.
- Why were these bishops gathering from every corner of the world? What was this extraordinary event?
  - They were gathering because Pope John XXIII had called them there for this great Council.
    - When the elderly John XXIII had been elected as Pope late in 1958, it had been assumed that he would have a relatively short, uneventful time as pope.
    - Instead, he shocked the world on January 25, 1959, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul when he announced his intention to call an Ecumenical Council in Rome.
    - In the presence of the faithful who were gathered in the the Grand Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls of Rome to celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul and the many cardinals who were at the Mass with him, Pope John XXIII announced his hope for an Ecumenical Council to come to grips with the spiritual needs of the modern world and to work toward the unity of all Christians.
    - The Cardinals in particular were surprised by this announcement, but the Pope's mind was made up.

- As you may recall, St. Paul had been blinded by a flash of heavenly light on the Road to Damascus as he encountered Jesus Christ and was converted.
    - Now, Pope John XXIII said that the idea of this Ecumenical Council had hit him like a flash of heavenly light for the renewal of the Church.
  - Backing up one step further, what is an Ecumenical Council?
    - An Ecumenical Council is a gathering of bishops from throughout the world to settle matters of doctrine and practice.
    - The word “Ecumenical” means the “whole inhabited world,” because such councils involve bishops from the whole world to settle controversies for the whole Church.
    - There had been 20 previous Ecumenical Councils, and each had been called together in response to some *controversy* regarding doctrine.
      - The very first Ecumenical Council was the Council of Nicea
        - It was gathered in response to a heresy of Arianism, that said Jesus did not possess the same divine nature as God the Father
        - The Council condemned this heresy and wrote the earliest version of the Nicene Creed that we recite each Sunday at Mass.
      - Other Ecumenical Councils had been gathered to address heresies about the Holy Spirit, about the person of Jesus Christ, about the Virgin Mary, about the use of images, about the saints, about the Eucharist, and about various practical matters of Church governance, like the election of popes.
      - The two most recent Ecumenical Councils had been the Council of Trent in the 1500’s in response to the Protestant Reformation and the First Vatican Council in the 1800’s in response to the Enlightenment.
    - Each Ecumenical Council had been convened to settle some controversy or condemn some heresy that threatened to divide the Church.
  - What was so unusual about Pope John XXIII’s request for an Ecumenical Council in 1959, however, was that there was no obvious controversy to settle or heresy to condemn.
    - Catholics of that time seemed to know Catholic teaching well and were very faithful to Catholic teaching.
    - There was a great deal of curiosity, then, about why Pope John XXIII had called together this 21<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council of the Church.
- Moving forward again to October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII made his intentions clear as he addressed the two thousand bishops who had gathered in St. Peter’s Basilica.
  - He said:
    - *The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously....*
    - *The salient point of this Council is not... a discussion of one article of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has been repeatedly taught..., and*

*which is presumed to be well known and familiar to all. For this a Council was not necessary...*

- *[Yet] the substance of the ancient doctrine of the Deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration.*
- The Council was to consider how the Church presents herself and the truth of the Gospel in the world today.
- Previous Councils had gathered primarily to settle great disagreements and combat heresies, but this Council was gathering instead to more effectively hand on this ancient Catholic faith in a rapidly changing world.
  - John XXIII explicitly explained that the Council was not being called to issue condemnations to the world, but to offer the mercy of God.
  - He said, *“We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays however, the Spouse of Christ [i.e., the Church] prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.”*
- With the words of this opening speech, Pope John XXIII expressed a sentiment that was shared by many other Catholics.
  - The world of the 1960s was dramatically different than that of the sixteenth century, and the Catholic Church had primarily taken a posture of self-defense throughout the centuries of change.
    - Popes and bishops of preceding centuries had fought relentlessly to protect the ancient doctrines and rituals of the Church from distortion.
      - In the sixteenth century, the Church defended herself from the rise of Protestantism, which challenged Catholics teachings about the sacraments and about salvation.
      - In the nineteenth century, the Church defended itself against the rise of Modernism, which had brought about an increase in atheism, materialism, and a general lack of faith.
  - In their noble efforts to defend tradition through the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Modern Era, Catholic leaders had given the impression that the primary job of the Church is to condemn the errors of the world.
    - This reputation had reached a peak at the turn of the twentieth century under the pontificate of Pope St. Pius X, a very holy man who was nonetheless known for his forceful judgments against modern theological errors.

- This same anti-Modernist self-defense continued in various ways up to the eve of the Second Vatican Council, and there was a growing realization among some that a new approach to the modern world was necessary.
  - Pope John XXIII, who had been pope for a few short years, seemed to embody such an approach and challenged the Council to do the same.
    - At a time when televisions were spreading rapidly, this stout and jolly pope was more visible to the world than any of his predecessors and had captured the hearts of people throughout the world.
    - His warm personality, incessant smile, and obvious gentleness had earned him the nickname “Good Pope John.”
    - The Second Vatican Council was his own initiative, flowing from his desire to renew the Church in its most basic mission.
    - While in no way denying that there are errors to be addressed in the modern world, Pope John XXIII explained that it was time to approach the world not with condemnation, but with a fresh proclamation of the truth of Jesus Christ.
    - Pope John XXIII’s opening address spoke out against any “prophets of gloom” who could see nothing but evil in modern man, instead inviting the Church to discover ways to live out and speak the ancient truth of Catholicism in a way that would make sense to modern thinkers.
    - *“The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing,” he explained, “and the way in which it is presented is another.”*
    - By renewing the Church in the modern world, Pope John XXIII hoped to embolden the Church in its mission to share the truth of Jesus and hoped to bring about unity among Christians.
    - Good Pope John spoke of this Council as a “new Pentecost,” a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church to strengthen her in her mission today.
- The Second Vatican Council would meet for four long sessions over a period of four years, from 1962 – 1965 and would cover a wide variety of topics.
- The first topic that they addressed in their first session was the liturgy itself, the way that we worship.
  - Although the Mass was celebrated originally in Aramaic and then in Greek, Roman Catholics had celebrated the liturgy in Latin since the third or fourth century.
    - In the third or fourth century, Latin was the common language of the people, but Latin eventually gave way to modern languages – English, French, Spanish, Italian, etc.
    - In the sixteenth century, Protestantism argued that worship should be in the language of the people, not Latin.
    - The Catholic Church in the Council of Trent, however, maintained the use of Latin in the Mass.

- The use of this ancient, universal language united each Roman Catholic with all other Catholics in the world and with Roman Catholics throughout history.
- While the world of Protestantism was constantly changing and, unfortunately, splintering in disagreements and various national groups, the Catholic Church sought to solidify the unity of the Church by ensuring that all Roman Catholics throughout the world would attend Mass with the same ancient Latin texts.
- The Mass changed very little from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s.
- At the Second Vatican Council, however, the Catholic Church was ready to readdress the question of the language of the liturgy and, to some extent, the structure of the Mass.
  - A Liturgical Movement had been underway within the Catholic Church for a number of decades, and there was a growing awareness of the importance of lay Catholics being able to participate fully in the Mass, not just watch as the priest prays in Latin.
    - Prior to Vatican II, fuller participation in the Mass had been promoted by making sure lay Catholics had access to translations of all of the prayers of the Mass so that they could follow along.
    - In some places, Catholics in the pews had been encouraged to pray aloud the Latin responses that were proper to the people, but in most places those in the pews just followed along as the priest and the altar servers together prayed the Latin texts of the Mass.
    - There was a growing realization the Catholics in the pews would be able to participate most fully if permission were given to pray at least parts of the Mass in the common language of the people.
  - In preparation for the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Curia – i.e, the various Vatican Offices, staffed by bishops and priests, that work with the pope to govern the Church – had prepared a number of draft documents that would be used in the debates of the Council.
    - Each of these draft documents is called a *schema* and the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council would use them to produce the final documents of the Second Vatican Council.
    - They chose to discuss the schema on the liturgy first, because it was considered the most urgent.
    - For nearly a month, the Council Fathers debated on whether and to what extent the vernacular languages should be allowed in the Mass and debated various other changes in Catholic liturgy.
      - It's worth explaining here that the Second Vatican Council itself did not itself work out the details of the New Mass that we have now become familiar with since the 1970s.

- Instead, the Council Fathers laid out basic principles for reforming the liturgy of the Church, and another Commission used those guidelines to bring about the updated Roman Missal.
- The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council eventually issued a document entitled *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.
- This document wasn't quite finished in the first session of the four sessions of the Council, but the bulk of the work for the document had been completed.
  - The Latin title for this and all Church documents is simply the first few Latin words of the document, in this case *Sacrosanctum Concilium* or, "The Sacred Council"
  - SC draws from Scripture to explain the Catholic understanding of the liturgy and principles for its reform in the modern world.
    - It explains that through Baptism we have been united to the death and Resurrection of Christ.
    - We have died with Christ and now rise again to live as children of God in Christ
    - In the Mass, we who have become members of the body of Christ have the privilege of participating in the sacrifice of Jesus, offering our lives to God the Father with him.
    - We are united to Jesus' own heavenly worship of God the Father.
    - For this reason, SC says, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows"
  - This means that we cannot participate in the Mass halfheartedly, we fully, consciously, actively unite ourselves to Jesus Christ when we participate in the Mass.
    - *SC 14. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else.*
    - In other words, it is not enough for us to simply go through the motions at Mass, and the Church understood that renewing the way the Mass is celebrated could help us properly participate in the Mass!

- At the same time, there is a reverence for the traditional use of Latin in the liturgy. SC says: (36) *[T]he use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended.... (54) Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.*
- The topic of the Mass is probably the most talked about aspect of the Second Vatican Council, but it is certainly not the only part of the Council's teaching, nor was it the only reform that the document began
  - Revised the liturgy of the hours, the collection of psalms and prayers that priests every day
  - It reformed the liturgical calendar to emphasize the feasts of the life of Jesus and to deemphasize the feasts of the saints
  - It expanded the lectionary, the prescribed Scripture readings for Mass, to include a much larger selection of Scripture, so that it now covers nearly the entire Bible in a three year cycle
  - It called for the reinstitution of the catechumenate, the ancient process by which adults prepared for baptism in the early Church. We now often refer to this process of conversion as RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- After debating the liturgy in the first session, the Council Fathers moved on to talk about Divine Revelation
  - Topics on divine revelation to be addressed included
    - How do we know the truth that God has revealed to us?
    - What is the relationship between Scripture and Tradition?
    - How are we to properly interpret the Bible today, thousands of years after it was written?
  - While the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had been pleased with the Roman Curia's schema on the liturgy and had been able to work with it to produce the final document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, they were not at all pleased with the schema on divine revelation.
    - While Pope John XXIII had called for the bishops to be optimistic in the modern world and to offer the world mercy rather than condemnation, the draft by the Curia seemed to list of condemnations of the modern world.
      - Pope John XXIII and the Roman Curia drafters of this document were not on the same page in their approach to the modern world.
      - The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, however, had embraced Pope John XXIII's vision for this Council, and responded accordingly.

- In their debates about this draft, the Council Fathers emphasized that the Catholic faith is not just a list of doctrines that must be defended from heresy, but is above all faith in a PERSON, Jesus Christ.
    - God didn't become man to reveal a list of doctrines, but to reveal himself, and all of our teaching must reflect that.
    - As the French Bishop Schmidt argued, "All revelation consists in the person of Christ... Let us not reduce Christian revelation and Christianity itself to a kind of ideology. [Christianity is] not something purely intellectual."
    - The work of the Church involves correcting errors, but this is not the Church's primary mission.
    - The Church's primary mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ.
  - The Council Fathers successfully worked to completely reject this initial draft, with the support of Pope John XXIII, and much more positive new draft was begun by a team of theological experts.
  - As a side note, one of the theological experts who helped draft the document was a young priest named Fr. Joseph Ratzinger, who is now Pope Benedict XVI.
    - The fact that this young priest was considered one of the more progressive theological experts at the time highlights how much the Catholic Church has changed in 50 years.
  - The success of the Council Fathers in rejecting the original draft of this document is considered by many to be a turning point in the history of the Second Vatican Council.
    - It showed that they had truly embraced the wisdom of Pope John XXIII in his opening address some months earlier.
    - They, too, were convinced that the Gospel would be proclaimed most effectively to the modern world when spoken with charity, not with criticism.
    - They, too, sought to follow the words of Jesus Christ, who said that he came not to condemn the world, but to save it.
- When the first Session of Vatican II ended in December of 1962, the Council had finished the bulk of the work on the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and had begun to redraft the document on divine revelation, but there was still much work to be done.
- On June 3, 1963, before the second session of Vatican II had begun, Good Pope John died of cancer, which he had quietly battled for a few months.
  - Pope Paul VI was elected shortly thereafter.
- When Pope Paul VI opened the Second Session of Vatican II in September 1963, he beautifully captured the key insights that the bishops were uncovering in the Second Vatican Council.
  - He recalled with great emphasis the words of an ancient fourth century Gregorian chant, recited weekly in the prescribed prayers of Catholic priests and religious:
    - *Te Christe, solum novimus!* "We know you alone, Christ!"



- All of Catholicism is ultimately about Jesus Christ.
  - Paul VI recalled the breathtaking thirteenth century mosaic found in the apse of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls.
    - The mosaic features Christ enthroned in majesty, holding open the Book of the Gospels. Pope Honorius III, who had commissioned the masterpiece during the High Middle Ages, is depicted at the feet of Christ, barely noticeable.
    - Describing the mosaic scene, Pope Paul VI said his predecessor Honorius was “small and insignificant, throwing himself down to kiss the feet of Christ, who infinitely surpasses him in greatness.
    - This scene,” he explained, “repeats itself here, we believe, not in the manner of artistic repetition, but, in reality, here in our gathering.”
    - He ended his exhortation by praying, “May he, the Lord himself, be the real president of this Council.”
    - Pope Paul VI made it clear that the role of the bishops is to humbly kneel before Christ, learning at his feet, proclaiming Him to the rest of the Church and to the world.
  - Paul VI reoutlined the four principal tasks of the bishops gathered in Council: 1) To more clearly define the nature of the Church, 2) to renew the Church in its relationship with Christ, 3) to reestablish unity among Christians, and 4) to dialogue in charity with the contemporary world.
  - During the Second Session, the Church approved the final version of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, began debate on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and approved a short document on the significance and appropriate use of modern media, called *Inter Mirifica*.
- Discussion on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which continued into the third session of the Council, produced another of the most significant documents of Vatican II.
  - The final name of the document was *Lumen Gentium*, which means light of the nations, comes from the first sentence, “Christ is the Light of the Nations.”
    - The document speaks about the mission of the Church to share this light with all the world.
    - Even though the Constitution on the Liturgy gets all of the attention, it has been said that this document is the most foundational document of Vatican II
  - The document seeks to reflect upon the “Mystery” of the Church the Christ established, while touching upon a few key issues:
    - The most basic point is found in the first paragraph:
      - *the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race*
      - In other words, God’s will for our salvation is to us into communion with himself and with each other.

- The Church, united in faith, hope, and in charity, is the communion that God has called together into his light.
  - The Church is a sacrament, or an outward sign, that God desire all people to be united to himself and to each other.
  - The Church is the People of God who have been made one by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are perfectly one.
- The document seeks to emphasize that there is more to the Church than just its hierarchical structure – i.e., the leadership of the pope, bishops, and priests.
    - The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ on Earth, as St. Paul says in Scripture.
    - The church is the Bride of Christ, the Sheepfold of Christ, the Temple of God.
    - All members of the Church, not just priests and bishops, to be made truly transformed in holiness by Christ, the head of the Church - The Council spoke of the “universal call to holiness.”
  - *Lumen Gentium* also emphasized that all bishops – not just the pope, who is the bishop of Rome – are responsible for the spiritual care of the Church, because Christ entrusted authority not to Peter alone, but to all of the Apostles.
  - Finally, document sought to tackle a particular sticky question - if Christ established only one Church, as we see in Matthew 16, where is that Church today, and who belongs to it?
    - 8 - *Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church... This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority, which He erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth". This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure.*
    - *Lumen Gentium* strives to balance two important truths:
      - First, Christ established only one Church and entrusted Peter and his successors, the popes, with the tasks of governing it, so the fullness of the means of salvation are found within the Catholic Church.
      - At the same time, however, the Catholic Church does not have a monopoly on God’s grace – many elements of holiness and truth exist among non-Catholics, especially among non-Catholic Christians.

- Lumen Gentium emphasized our unity with non-Catholic Christians, and our desire that we be fully united in faith:
    - *15 - The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ.... we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd, and He prompts them to pursue this end.*
  - The document goes so far as to explain that it is possible for those who are not Christian to enter heaven, in ways known to God alone: (16) *“Those also can attain to salvation who through **no fault of their own** do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.”*
  - The document nonetheless underscored the Church’s obligation to proclaim the Gospel, the ultimate source of our salvation.
    - Lumen Gentium, which is among the longest of the Vatican II documents, was approved at the end of the Third Session of the Council.
- Most of the other documents that the Second Vatican Council approved in the third and fourth sessions of Vatican II in many ways flowed from this fuller understanding of the Church and her mission.
  - There were 16 Vatican II documents in all, though I’ll just highlight a few.
  - The Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* expanded upon the Catholic Church’s commitment to Christian unity.
  - The Decree on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostae Aetate* highlights our bonds with non-Christians, especially Jews, and encourages charitable dialogue with them.
  - The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* discussed the importance of lay Catholics participating in the mission of the Church.
  - The Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, expanded upon the need to proclaim the kingdom of God in the world today.

- I'll return now to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, which went through a number of revisions after the original schema was rejected in the very first session of the Council.
  - The final version of the document, called *Dei Verbum*, Latin for "The Word of God," is one of the most important documents of the Council and didn't reach its final form until the final session of the Second Vatican Council.
  - This document points to Jesus Christ as the mediator and fullness of God's revelation.
    - All of salvation history points to him, the savior of humanity.
    - All of Scripture is ultimately about him.
    - Through his words and his deeds, Jesus Christ reveals God's love for us and his plan for our salvation.
  - The document talks about how we can know today, 2000 years after Jesus's earthly life, what is true
    - First, of course, we have Scripture
    - The truth of Jesus Christ was prepared for in the pages of the Old Testament, then the events of Jesus' life and the truth of his message are recorded in the New Testament.
    - *Dei Verbum* encourages all Catholics to read the Bible and to know it well, quoting St. Jerome, who said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."
    - Yet, *Dei Verbum* very beautifully explains the significance not only of Scripture, but of Sacred Tradition.
      - It says, (9) "*Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity*"
      - (10) Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.
    - Along with *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum* speaks about the role of the teaching authority of the Church, the Magisterium, in guarding and proclaiming Scripture and Tradition.
      - (10) *the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws*

*from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.*

- In other words, the Word of God, the truth of Christ, is contained in Scripture and in the oral teachings entrusted to the Apostles, Sacred Tradition.
- Jesus Christ gave authority to the Apostles, led by Peter, to guard and hand on this truth, and the Apostles then gave that same divine authority to their successors, the bishops, led by the successor of Peter, the pope.
- The pope and bishops today guard and proclaim this same truth, which is contained in Scripture and Tradition.
- This thorough explanation of divine revelation is extremely important, and is to some extent the KEY to avoiding misunderstanding of the Second Vatican Council
  - After the Second Vatican Council, the Mass changed fairly dramatically, and a number of other aspects of Catholic life changed fairly dramatically.
  - Yet *Dei Verbum* reaffirmed that there are certain things - the truths of the word of God, as found in Scripture and Apostolic Tradition - that cannot change.
  - The Second Vatican Council made it clear that when the Church speaks about her task to guard “Tradition,” that doesn’t mean that the Church can’t change at all, because we have to do things the way that we’ve always done things, but it does mean that there are certain truths that will never be negotiable.
    - *Dei Verbum* explains that *Apostolic* Tradition - those teachings and practices entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and kept to the present day – are part of the truth of Jesus Christ, and we must submit to them.
- After the Second Vatican Council, it was often said that this was one of the most neglected documents of the Council, because one people saw that the language of the Mass and other aspects of Catholic life could change, they thought that everything could change.
  - But they were seriously mistaken.
  - While Vatican II affirmed that the Church can and should live out and proclaim the message of the Gospel in a way that the modern world can understand, we still must be faithful to that Gospel, to Scripture and Apostolic Tradition.
- The last document of the Second Vatican Council to be promulgated was the longest, and in many cases the most celebrated – *Gaudium et Spes* The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

- This document did not spring from any of the drafts of the Roman Curia, but from the initiative of the Council Fathers themselves.
- One of the key drafters of this document was Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, who would later become Pope John Paul II.
- The first sentence in many ways sums up the document – “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”
- GS spoke about the obligation of the Church to be aware of the needs of the modern world and to take an active role in addressing them.
- The document is more of a meditation on the situation of humanity than a statement of doctrine.
- The document assessed various situation of the world at the time and spoke about the Church’s role in the midst of those situations. It spoke about:
  - The dignity of the human person
  - The importance of the social nature of humans
  - The dignity of marriage and the family
  - The development of human culture
  - Economics, with a focus on our obligation to assist the poor
  - Political Involvement
  - Promotion of World Peace
- The document reflects upon some of the deep questions that echo in the hearts of modern men and women:
  - *(10) what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress? What purpose have these victories purchased at so high a cost? What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life?*
- Gaudium et Spes explains that the answer to these and all questions can be found by looking at Jesus Christ:
  - *(10)The Church holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*
- Over a period of four years, over two thousand bishops and heads of Religious Orders from throughout the world gathered for the momentous gathering known as the Second Vatican Council.
  - Their goal was to rejuvenate the Church in its most basic mission – to proclaim Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever – in a rapidly changing world.
  - To proclaim Jesus Christ who answers the deepest questions in the heart of the human person and who reveals the very meaning of our lives.

- This challenging mission prompted the to renew its celebration of the liturgy, to reflect more deeply on the mystery of the Church, to strive for unity among Christians and dialogue with other world religions.
- Those who lived through the changes in the Church in the past 50 years know that the time after the Council has been filled with a number of difficulties, as we have struggled to come to grips with our mission and to discern which parts of the Christian life can change and which can't.
- Today, 50 years after the Opening of the Second Vatican Council, we begin the Year of Faith, a year for each of us to recall Vatican II and the mission that it set before us.
  - During this year, we are called to ask ourselves whether we ourselves are being faithful to the mission that Christ has entrusted to us.
  - Are we living as his disciples in the Church, faithfully holding fast to the Word of God, participating fully in the liturgical life that he has given us, constantly deepening our relationship with Him.
  - Do we know Jesus Christ, and the truth that he reveals to us in Scripture and Tradition?
  - I'd like to close with two simple recommendations to help us deepen our faith in the Person of Jesus Christ:
    - Prayerfully read Sacred Scripture
    - Study the Catechism of the Catholic Church –
      - an official summary of the unchanging truths of the Catholic Faith that are contained in Scripture and Tradition, drawn from the 21 Ecumenical Councils of the Church
      - Today is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Publication of this Great Document, which is one of the greatest fruits of Vatican II
      - Summarizes the truths of Catholic teaching, showing that all of the Catholic faith is centered on Jesus Christ and on our communion with Him
  - In short, we must grow closer to Jesus Christ during this year.
    - Faith is submitting ourselves to Jesus Christ and to the truth that he revealed, the truth that he is
    - This is what the Second Vatican Council called for, and this is what the Year of Faith calls for.
    - May each of us wholeheartedly answer that call.