



# INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

How Catholics Do It

# Why Bother?

*In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to us in a human way.*

*To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words.*

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation 12

# How do we?...

Pay attention to:

- a) What the human authors truly wanted to affirm.
- b) What God wanted to reveal to us by the authors' words.

By using an accepted

**Method of biblical  
interpretation**

# Historical Criticism

- ▣ Reconstructs the historical situation.
- ▣ Works to identify what the author actually meant to say.
- ▣ Is basic to all other forms of interpretation.
  - Source criticism is a sub-discipline.

# Types of Questions

In order to interpret a passage using historical criticism the following types of questions are asked of the text.

- What were the historic, social, cultural, political contexts?
- When & where was it written?
- By whom was it written?
- Who were the audiences?
- What sources were used?

# Literary Criticism

- ▣ Examines text as a finished piece of literature.
- ▣ Analyses language use, style, genres etc.
- ▣ Focus what can be learnt from text itself.
  - Narrative criticism is a specialised branch.

# Types of Questions

In order to interpret a passage using literary criticism the following types of questions are asked of the text.

- What use is made of language, style & genre in the text.
- How are characters portrayed?
- How are relationships presented?
- What audiences are addressed?
- Who was the passage written for?

# Using a method

- ▣ Carefully read the Scripture passage.
- ▣ Answer the questions.
  - Continually ask yourself
    - ▣ How does this affect the meaning of the text?
    - ▣ What is this telling me that helps me understand what the passage is saying?