

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever

For some time, we've been looking at the foundations of our belief in the Catholic Church, and at her unchangeable doctrines guaranteed by the Holy Spirit: a rock of certainty amidst a world of change. Vatican II proclaimed: 'The Church 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.' (*Gaudium et spes* (1965) 10, quoting *Heb* 13:8)

We rightly rejoice in this firm stability that Christ gives us. When he proclaimed his great *Credo of the People of God*, Pope St Paul VI warned: 'We see even Catholics allowing themselves to be seized by a kind of passion for change and novelty... The greatest care must be taken, while fulfilling the indispensable duty of research, to do no injury to the teachings of Christian doctrine. For that would be to give rise... to disturbance and perplexity in many faithful souls.' (*Solemni hac liturgia* (1968))

And Pope Francis declared in *Lumen Fidei*: 'By professing the same faith, we stand firm on the same rock, we are transformed by the same Spirit of love, we radiate one light and we have a single insight into reality. Since faith is one, it must be professed in all its purity and integrity... The magisterium always speaks in obedience to the prior word on which faith is based; it is reliable because of its trust in the word which it hears, preserves and expounds.' (47-49)

Today we take stock and summarise many of the examples we've seen of doctrines taught infallibly – either to be believed by divine and Catholic Faith, or to be held definitively. (Infallible teaching has been our primary focus, though we also recall the vast number of non-infallible Magisterial teachings to which we nonetheless adhere with religious submission.)

Canon law states: 'No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident.' (Canon 749.3) Rather than make our own assessments of what is 'manifestly evident' in this regard, we've taken as our standard the judgements of the Holy See, in particular the examples from the 1998 *Doctrinal Commentary*. Then there are the teachings that, although not solemnly defined, are nevertheless taught infallibly by the Ordinary and Universal Magisterium. Again, in identifying those, we've especially relied on the Holy See's judgements.

So – without repeating all the references and nuances, which are found in the various Allocutiones – a panorama of some of the infallible teachings of the Catholic Church:

- First, obviously, the existence of the 'one God, true and living, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth': (DS 3001) known by faith indeed, though also knowable with certainty by natural light of reason. Then, the different divine attributes as professed by the Ecumenical Councils.

- The dogmas of the Nicene Creed, in particular the Trinity of persons. In the words of the Athanasian Creed: 'Now this is the Catholic Faith. We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.' (DS 75)

- God's free creation of all things from nothing – in particular, of the angels, and of human beings, with the direct creation of the spiritual soul of each one. The fall of our first parents, with 'Adam, the first man' losing 'the holiness and justice in which he had been constituted'; and losing for us that same holiness and justice, with not only death of the body but 'sin also, which is the death of the soul', 'one in origin' but 'transmitted to all'. (DS 1511-13)

- At the centre of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ, ‘the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity’, (DS 301) who died for our salvation, and ‘on the third day rose again by a true Resurrection of the flesh.’ (DS 852)

- Mary, truly Mother of God; immaculate from her conception, that is, preserved free from all stain of original sin; perpetual in virginity; and assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

- The foundation of the Church by Christ, and its necessity for salvation: ‘They could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.’ (Vatican II *Lumen gentium* 14 (DS 4136)) The primacy over the universal Church given by Christ to Peter; with the Roman Pontiffs being, by ‘the institution of Christ’, perpetual successors ‘of blessed Peter in the same primacy’. (DS 3058) The Pope has full, supreme and immediate authority over the whole Church, and when he speaks *ex cathedra*, possesses that infallibility that Christ willed for his Church.

- Christ’s institution of the Seven Sacraments, which always confer grace on those who do not place an obstacle. The Mass as a true Sacrifice offered to God; and Christ’s true, real and substantial presence in the Holy Eucharist, ‘body and blood...soul and divinity’. (DS 1651) This is by transubstantiation, the substance of bread and wine no longer existing, being completely transformed into Christ’s body and blood. We give to the Eucharist the supreme honour of *latria* – worship and adoration that may be given to God alone

- The full canon of Scripture, inspired by God, and free from error in whatever is asserted as true by the sacred writers, since the same ‘must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit’. (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 11 (DS 4216))

- Then there were the examples of moral doctrines infallibly taught by the Ordinary and Universal Magisterium: the grave immorality of directly killing an innocent human being; of abortion; of euthanasia. We also saw how principal doctrines regarding sexual morality and the sixth commandment have been infallibly taught in the same way. The *Doctrinal Commentary* gave several other examples of infallible teaching: the Church’s inability to confer priestly ordination on women (recently reaffirmed as definitive by Pope Francis); the legitimacy of a papal election or an Ecumenical Council; canonisations of saints.

- Finally, the doctrines on life beyond death: that those in heaven see clearly God himself as he is – some indeed, ‘more perfectly than others, according to the diversity of merits.’ (DS 1305) The debt of punishment in purgatory that can remain before entering heaven – souls detained there being helped by our prayers, especially by the Mass; and by indulgences, the reality of which is also infallible teaching. But the souls of those who die in mortal sin ‘go down into hell immediately after death.’ (DS 1002) All ‘will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear to receive according to their works, whether these have been good or evil, the ones perpetual punishment with the devil and the others everlasting glory with Christ.’ (DS 801)

But beyond individual doctrines, we have universal Catholic Faith. As Vatican I declared, ‘All those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith that are contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which by the Church, either in solemn judgment or through her ordinary and universal magisterium, are proposed for belief as having been divinely revealed.’ (DS 3011; cf. Canon 750.1) Recalling the words of Benedict XV (*Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (1914) 24, which quotes the *Athanasian Creed*): ‘Such is the nature of Catholicism that it does not admit of more or less, but must be held as a whole or as a whole rejected: “This is the Catholic faith, which unless a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved”.’