

# THE FOUR SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

This medieval couplet summarizes these four senses: "Lettera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia." This translates to: "The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; the Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny" (CCC 118).



## THE LITERAL SENSE

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual. The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal" (CCC 115-116). The literal sense of Scripture refers to the actual event, person, thing described in the biblical text.

Example: The Temple - 1 Kings, Chapter 8

This chapter records the dedication of the Temple by Solomon. In the Old Testament, God dwelt within the Temple in the Holy of Holies, and it was a place to worship and offer sacrifices.

## THE SPIRITUAL SENSE

According to the Catechism, "Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs." (CCC 117). The spiritual sense of Scripture is divided into three categories: allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

### ALLEGORICAL

The allegorical sense refers to the meaning that is hidden beneath the surface of the text.

Example: The Temple  
John 2: 19-22

In this scripture passage, Jesus speaks of the temple that would be destroyed and raised up in three days. Looking deeper into the text, we can conclude that Jesus was referring to the temple of his own body and his resurrection.

### MORAL

The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction" (CCC 117).

Example: The Temple  
1 Corinthians 6:19

In this verse, we find a moral interpretation of the temple, where we are instructed that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We must use the gift of our bodies to glorify God.

### ANAGOGICAL

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 117).

Example: The Temple  
Revelation 21:22

This Scripture verse describes the nature of Heaven, where Christ is present and there is no need for an earthly building like the temple.