

CATECHESIS #17

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Why are there four different Gospels?

The translation of the word “Gospel” is literally “Good News!” In the Bible, we find four books often referred to as “the Gospels.” Despite the differences that can be found between the gospels, there are no contradictions in the Good News. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all tell the same story.

Each evangelist wrote for a specific group of people. Matthew, writing for the Jews, emphasizes the connections between the Old Testament and Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies. Mark, as St Peter’s helper, wrote for the Romans and knowing their desire for proofs, focuses on Jesus’ miracles. Luke, St Paul’s companion, wrote for the Greeks appealing especially to their love of learning portraying Jesus as a great teacher. John wrote for all of us as he says: “...these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

Remembering that Jesus lived in a time before media coverage, it should not be surprising that the four accounts of His life are somewhat varied. As His messages were not instantaneously broadcast on public media, it can be assumed that Jesus often repeated His Good News as He traveled. For example, it should not cause concern that Matthew has Jesus presenting the Beatitudes on a mount while Luke recounts the event happening on a plain. Jesus probably repeated this very important teaching more than once. A good investigator interrogates many witnesses to establish a factual account; so all the gospels complement each other, revealing a unified narrative.

The Gospels recount the story of Jesus’ life and teachings while on Earth from the time of His conception to His Ascension into Heaven. Even with four gospel accounts, it is not possible to record all the words that Jesus ever spoke or to describe everything He did. John himself states “... there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) Though there were many other accounts of Christ’s life written, Church Fathers, from the time of the apostles, have accepted only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as truly inspired books worthy of inclusion in the Bible. Together, they proclaim the one message of Jesus Christ, the Good News of our salvation.