



Introduction: What Are the Synoptic Gospels?

When we open the New Testament, we encounter four accounts of Jesus' life: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are known as the **Synoptic Gospels**, a term derived from the Greek *syn* (together) and *opsis* (view), meaning they can be “viewed together” due to their similarities in structure, content, and narrative.

Unlike the Gospel of John, which has a more theological and mystical focus, the Synoptics present a complementary vision of Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection. But why are they so important? How can we study them to grow in our faith?

In this article, we will explore:

1. **The origin and history** of the Synoptic Gospels.
2. **Their theological relevance** and how they complement each other.
3. **A practical guide** for reading and applying them in spiritual life.

1. Origin and History of the Synoptic Gospels

Who Wrote Them and When?

According to Church tradition:

- **Matthew**, one of the twelve apostles, wrote his Gospel primarily for Jewish converts, presenting Jesus as the promised Messiah.
- **Mark**, a disciple of Peter, wrote his Gospel based on the preaching of the first Pope, in a direct and dynamic style.
- **Luke**, a physician and companion of Paul, carefully researched the events (Luke 1:3) and wrote for the Gentiles, emphasizing Christ's mercy.

It is believed that Mark was the first to be written (around 65 A.D.), followed by Matthew and Luke, who likely used Mark as a source along with other oral and written traditions (known as “Q” in biblical studies).

The Synoptic Problem

Scholars noticed that these Gospels share nearly identical passages but also have



differences. This led to the **“Synoptic Source Theory,”** which proposes that:

- Mark was a source for Matthew and Luke.
- A hypothetical document (*Q*, from the German *Quelle*, meaning “source”) contained sayings of Jesus.
- Each evangelist adapted the material according to their audience and theological purpose.

However, the Catholic faith maintains that, although there is a human process in the writing, the Gospels are **the inspired Word of God** (2 Timothy 3:16).

2. Theological Relevance: What Do the Synoptics Teach Us?

Each Gospel has a unique focus:

Matthew: Jesus, the New Moses

- Presents Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies (Matthew 5:17).
- Includes the Sermon on the Mount (ch. 5-7), revealing the New Law.
- Ideal for those seeking to understand the Old Testament in light of Christ.

Mark: Jesus, the Servant in Action

- The shortest and most dynamic, filled with action (“immediately” is a key word).
- Shows Jesus as the Suffering Servant (Mark 10:45).
- Perfect for those needing to see Christ’s radical surrender.

Luke: Jesus, the Savior of All

- Emphasizes prayer, the Holy Spirit, and mercy (parables like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son).
- Ideal for those seeking a God close to sinners and the marginalized.

Why three similar versions?

In His wisdom, God wanted us to have a **multidimensional** vision of Jesus. As St. Augustine said: *“The Gospels are four in number, but one in spirit.”*



3. Practical Guide: How to Read and Live the Synoptic Gospels

A. Reading Method: *Lectio Divina*

1. **Reading** (What does the text say?).
2. **Meditation** (What is God saying to me?).
3. **Prayer** (How do I respond?).
4. **Contemplation** (How does this change my life?).

Example with Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus calms the storm):

- What does it say? Jesus sleeps in the boat, the disciples are afraid, He rebukes them for their lack of faith.
- What does it say to me? “Do you still have no faith?” (v. 40). In what storms of my life do I doubt God?
- Prayer: “Lord, increase my faith.”
- Action: Trust Christ in my crises.

B. Pastoral Application

1. **For personal life:**
 - **Matthew** calls us to live the Beatitudes (being poor in spirit, merciful).
 - **Mark** challenges us to follow Christ radically (“Whoever wants to follow me must take up their cross” – Mark 8:34).
 - **Luke** invites us to conversion and mercy (“Today salvation has come to this house” – Luke 19:9).
2. **For evangelization:**
 - Use **Matthew** with those seeking answers in Jewish tradition.
 - **Mark** for youth and action-oriented people.
 - **Luke** for those needing to hear of God’s unconditional love.

C. Reflection Questions

- Which image of Jesus resonates most with me: Teacher (Matthew), Servant (Mark), or Savior (Luke)?



- How can I imitate Christ in my daily life according to these Gospels?
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Conclusion: The Synoptics, a Path to Christ

The Synoptic Gospels are not just ancient texts; they are **a compass for the soul**. They show us a real, close Jesus—who teaches, heals, forgives, and saves.

As St. Jerome said: *“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”* I invite you to immerse yourself in them, compare their accounts, and allow yourself to be transformed.

Closing Prayer:

“Lord Jesus, as revealed by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, You are the Messiah, the Servant, and the Savior. Help me to know, love, and follow You each day. Amen.”

Which passage from the Synoptic Gospels has impacted you the most? Share it in the comments!