

THE CHURCH

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock,
I will build my church, and the powers of
death shall not prevail against it.*

—MATTHEW 16:18

SCRIPTURE READING

Either before you arrive or as you wait for class to begin, find this short passage from Sacred Scripture in your Bible or through an online search. Reading it will prepare you for this week's material.

—Colossians 1:17–26

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, reveal to us the mystery of your Church, which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Grant us the grace to perceive the splendor of the truth taught by your Church, and give us the heartfelt desire to participate in her visible communion. Amen.

SESSION 10 VIDEO LESSON: THE CHURCH

As you watch the video lesson, refer to these key highlights. Feel free to use the space provided to take notes.

- The Nicene Creed speaks about the four marks of the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

- The Church is apostolic because it was founded by Christ who gathered the initial twelve apostles and today remains the institution that stems from these earliest times. Continuity of identity and teaching is maintained down through time by the bishops, who are the successors of the apostles.

- The unity of the Church is based on the shared truth, sacramental life, and communion of charity that stands at the heart of the Church.



- ◆ The Church is holy in her grace (received from Christ), in her sacraments, and in her saints.
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- ◆ The Church is catholic, or “universal,” because she remains present in history, spreading gradually throughout all times and places. The human race is brought into a visible communion of truth and charity in and through the visible life of the Church.
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- God offers grace and the possibility of salvation to those who are not visible members of the Church. By cooperating with this grace, they can be drawn closer to the perfection of communion in the visible life of the Church.

Wisdom of the Saints

About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they're just one thing, and we shouldn't complicate the matter.

—St. Joan of Arc



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to answer these questions with a partner or with the group.

- Why does the visibility and the public unity of the Church matter?

2. How is the apostolic teaching of the Church maintained down through time?

3. What is the holiness of the Church? Where are we assured of its presence?

4. What is the importance of the visible catholicity or universality of the Church?



Catechism Connection



The comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church.

Not only is she gathered around him; she is united in him, in his body. Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ.

—CCC 789

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Discuss these questions with a partner or the group, or meditate on your own.

1. What does the visible communion of the Catholic Church offer each of us spiritually in our relationship with God? Do you find yourself respecting the global unity of the Church?

2. How do past historical figures help inspire us today through their example? How can the saints, then, inspire us to holiness? What is the role they can play in your life?

3. Does the authority of the Church offer you any comfort? Did it threaten you before? If so, how?

WITNESS TO CONVERSION

After concluding your group discussion, return to watch the second video where converts to the Catholic faith discuss their conversion and how they live today as Catholics.



Rome to Home

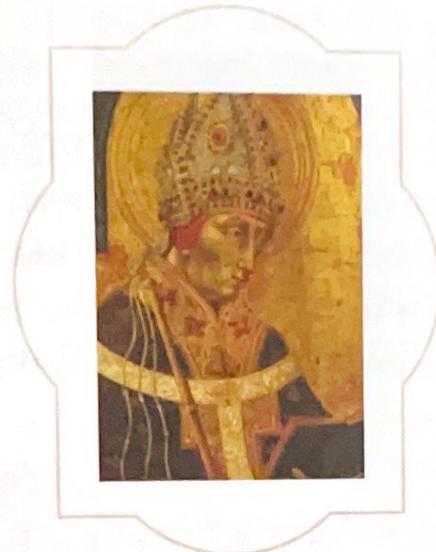
For the Catholic Church . . . the *communion* of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own *communion*, which is his eternal life. . . . To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church.

—Pope St. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 9

KEY TERMS

Apostolic Deposit of Faith: The revelation of Christ transmitted to us by the apostles and safeguarded by the Church.

Apostolic Succession: The succession of bishops ordained by previous bishops, tracing all the way back to Christ and the apostles.



Infallibility: The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church whereby the pastors of the Church (the pope and bishops in union with him) can definitively formulate a doctrine of faith or morals as contained within Revelation for the belief of the faithful. This is not set above the Faith or above Scripture but arises from Christ's institution of pastors in the Church charged with teaching the Gospel and authentically interpreting Divine Revelation and his promise to them of the aid of the Holy Spirit. Normally, the authoritative teaching of the Faith is formulated as the Church acts through the college of bishops with the pope at its head. This can happen in an ordinary way by the repeated proclamation of Church doctrine (the so-called "ordinary magisterium") or, in an extraordinary way, through an ecumenical council of bishops gathered in communion with the pope. There is also the extraordinary case of "papal infallibility," whereby, in extraordinary cases, the pope can "define" a specific formulation of the Church's belief as binding for belief. He does this by a solemn proclamation in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority as shepherd and teacher of all Christians. Not all opinions or statements of the pope should be considered infallible; rather, only those that are formulated in this special way and designated as such.



God's Word

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

—1 Timothy 3:14–16

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty Father, mercifully grant us an understanding of the mystery of the Church and a spiritual desire to enter into the fullness of communion in the Catholic Church. May your Holy Spirit enlighten us so that we perceive the marks of the Church: her unity, holiness, universality, and apostolic origin. May we be witnesses to Christ in our world today and become in turn defenders of the faith with your help. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT HOME REVIEW

Read this review of the material. Write down any questions you still have after doing so.

One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

The Nicene Creed says that the Church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” These four claims denote what are traditionally termed the “marks” of the Church. On one level, the marks of the Church are signs given to human

reason so that we can recognize the Catholic Church as the true Church founded by Christ. On a deeper level, the marks of the Church indicate a mystery: the Church is the mystical body of Christ. We should briefly consider each of the marks distinctly.

The Church is apostolic. According to the teaching of the New Testament, Christ founded the Catholic Church himself. It is of divine origin. We see this particularly in his choice of the twelve apostles (see Mt 10:1–2); that is to say, of the apostolic college, whose number is meant



to reflect the original twelve tribes of Israel. The apostles represent a new Israel that will now be opened through Christ's redemptive death to both Jews and gentiles in the sacraments, and especially through baptism. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).



Baptism incorporates Christians into one body that is both mystical and visible. The early Church understood this reality and recognized in Peter and the other apostles her visible leaders after the resurrection of Christ (see Mt 16:18; Acts 1-5; Gal 2:9). The apostles instituted bishops by ordination who governed local churches that the apostles founded, and in the post-apostolic age, the bishops understood themselves as the successors of the apostles, responsible for the visible unity and communion of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch writing around AD 110 already strongly underscored this fact: that the bishop is the principal celebrant of the Eucharist for his local church and that communion with the bishop at the Eucharistic altar assures the visible unity of the Church of Christ. This apostolicity of the Church is maintained down to our own age in unbroken fashion due to the continued lineage of bishops known as "apostolic succession," in addition to their unified communion, united with the successor of Peter and Paul in Rome, who is the pope.

The unity of the Church follows directly from its apostolicity. What binds the Church together is a common faith and a visible communion of charity in Christ. The faith of the Church is one down through the ages, and this unity of faith is manifested and maintained in part through the outward declarations of the doctrine of the Church. Solemnly defined dogmas ("the extraordinary Magisterium") and other official and definitive Church teachings ("the ordinary Magisterium") maintain the unity of the Church by identifying the true content of Divine Revelation and the right interpretation of the Gospel. Christ entrusted this office or responsibility for teaching the truth of the Faith to the apostles with St. Peter as their head; likewise, it has been handed down in the Church to the bishops (successors of the apostles) in communion with and under their head, the pope (the successor of St. Peter). This teaching authority is a part of Christ's commission to them to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. It is not something alien to Christian truth nor is it set above the Faith or the Scriptures. It is not a power "over" Revelation or "over" the truth; rather, it arises directly from the Faith itself, in service to the Word of God. Christ gave shepherds to the Church in part to ensure that Divine Revelation would be handed on and interpreted authentically, according to the truth and in obedience to it, and he promised the help of the Holy Spirit so that they could fulfill this responsibility.

The pope, by virtue of his office, has a particular charism and responsibility for maintaining the unity of the Church by assuring the infallibility of Church teaching. Not everything a pope says or teaches should be considered infallible. The pope teaches infallibly only when he solemnly designates his teaching as such, either in a council with other bishops or by a discrete act of proclamation known as "ex cathedra" (meaning, "from the chair" of Peter). The unity of the Church is assured not only by the commonly held truths of the faith but also by love: the communion of the Church is one of charity. The charity of the Church is especially manifest in the celebration of the Eucharist, where Christ renews the life of the Church by grace and binds the faithful more closely to God and to one another. At its heart, the visible Catholic Church is a communion of love.

The holiness of the Church derives immediately from the holiness of Christ. It is by his grace that the Church lives, both in her sacred teaching and in her communion of love. It should be made clear that all of the members of the Church (excluding Christ and the Virgin Mary) are sinners, but the Church herself is without sin insofar as her sacraments are channels of the grace of Christ, independently of the ministers who celebrate them, and her revealed teaching is received from God, who is all holy. She is also holy due to the grace of God that is present within her members, derived directly from Christ, the God-man. Of course, all of her visible members are people wounded by sin, to varying degrees, and they stand in need of gradual conversion, purification, and sanctification. The Church is a home for sinners who are called to salvation in Christ, not a place reserved only to those who count themselves pure. At the same time, by the grace of God, the Church also has produced a great multitude of holy saints down through the ages, persons who have been radically conformed to Christ in their lives of faith, hope, and charity, and who have often lived heroic lives for the sake of the Gospel. The communion of the saints in the Catholic Church is meant to magnify the presence of Christ and his unique grace. It gives us confidence in the presence of the Holy Spirit who actively sanctifies the faithful down through the ages.

The word *catholic* in Greek means “universal.” The catholicity of the Church denotes her universality. This universality is one of both time and place. From the beginning of the apostolic age until now, the Catholic Church perseveres down through time as the humble (at times almost hidden) but ever-present steward of the mysteries of God. She is a precursor of the kingdom of God that will be made manifest in the life to come. From the first age of her existence, the Church sent missionaries to all corners of the known world and, through time, has established a visible presence throughout the world, seeking to go to every known place. This presence continues to expand daily and is a sign of the reality of the promises of Christ: that he would remain with the Church always and accompany her in her mission even to the ends of the world (see Mt 28:20).

What about those who are outside of the visible frontiers of the Church? Can they find the truth and can they be saved by the grace of

God? Based on the authority of Scripture, the Catholic Church teaches that Christ died for *all* human beings. Consequently, God wills to offer the possibility of salvation to all, even those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to come to the explicit knowledge of Christ. This means that the invisible grace of Christ and his Church are present “at a distance,” acting in the minds and hearts of those who do not yet recognize either the existence of God the Holy Trinity, or Christ, or the Church. Those who are in invincible (non-culpable) ignorance about the mystery of Christ and the sacraments can be saved if they cooperate with this invisible working of grace faithfully.

In practice, it is not always possible to determine if this is taking place, and so we must leave the judgment of hearts to God alone. Theologians offer speculation about ways that non-Christians may cooperate with the grace of God; for example, through the workings of their moral conscience and in their sincere search for the truth, especially in regard to God and matters of religion. Often God draws people little by little into the visible communion of Church so that they eventually consent to baptism or to the confession of the fullness of the Catholic faith. The Holy Spirit is at work in the world calling all human beings to seek the truth so that they may find God. This is not a reason to abandon the work of evangelization, but on the contrary, it is the reason we should hope in the prospects of evangelization.

The Holy Spirit is at work outside the visible frontiers of the Church, touching hearts and minds. At the same time, the Church is necessary to us if we wish to find security in our relationship with God. Those who embrace the means of salvation found in the Catholic Church stand in a much more advantageous situation with regard to the judgment of God. As Jesus commands in Mark 16:15: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.”

I STILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

DIGGING DEEPER

Pope Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (1964).

White, Thomas Joseph. *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*.

Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017.

See esp. chap. 5, "The Church and the Sacraments."