

THE CHURCH



Opening Prayer

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of the Church which you established on Pentecost. We ask you to make the Church truly one body, one Spirit in Christ. Be with us as we learn more about your Church and help us to always recognize others as part of the same body, that we may treat them with dignity and respect. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading *1 Corinthians 12:12-20*

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is reminding the Christian community that the Church is made up of a group of people who are now one body through their connection with Jesus and the waters of Baptism. We all share in the same Holy Spirit.

What is the Church?

- The word "church" comes from the Greek word "ecclesia" which means "assembly," or more literally, "to call out."
- The word "Church" can mean:
 - An assembly of people gather together to celebrate the Eucharist. (parish)
 - A local community of believers. (diocese)
 - The universal family of believers.
- The Church has a human element, but also has a divine element, a supernatural reality. We must not only see the Church as human beings see it, but we must also view the Church through the eyes of Christ, her bridegroom.
- The Church is the communion of saints, which exist in three states: those who are on earth, those in heaven, and those who are being purified.

What are some images of the Church?

- **People of God**
 - The Church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9).
 - As the people of God, the Church is called to love and serve one another, spreading the Good News.
 - The Acts of the Apostles provides the model: people who organized their community around love and concern for one another.

- **Body of Christ**
 - The mystical body of Christ, the Church, is the completion of his physical body. Thus, the Church becomes the channel of salvation.
 - Christ as the head and the Church as his body is what makes the Church a sign to all people.
- **Sacrament of Christ**
 - The definition of a sacrament is a visible sign of the invisible presence and activity of God.
 - The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify, to build up the Body of Christ, and to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also instruct (CCC 1123).
- **Temple of the Holy Spirit**
 - The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, the source of its life, of its unity in diversity, and of the riches of its gifts and charisms.
 - The Holy Spirit makes the Church "the temple of the living God." For where the Church is, there also is the Holy Spirit.

What are the marks of the Church?

- **One:**
 - The Church is one because of her source: "the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit."
 - The Church is one because of her founder: for "the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, restoring the unity of all in one people and one body."
 - The Church is one because of her "soul": "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity." Unity is of the essence of the Church (CCC, 813).
- **Holy:** we draw our life from God.
 - "The Church . . . is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God." The Church, then, is "the holy People of God," and her members are called "saints."

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- United with Christ, the Church is sanctified by him; through him and with him she becomes sanctifying. "All the activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God." It is in the Church that "the fullness of the means of salvation" has been deposited. It is in her that "by the grace of God we acquire holiness." (CCC, 823-824)
- **Catholic:** "universal"
 - The word "catholic" means "universal," in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole." The Church is catholic in a double sense:
 - First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.
 - Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race (CCC, 830-831).
- **Apostolic:** our teachings are from the Apostles.
 - The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways:
 - she was and remains built on "the foundation of the Apostles," the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself;
 - with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching, the "good deposit," the salutary words she has heard from the apostles;
 - she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, "assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor" (CCC, 857).

Incarnating THE **KERYGMA** THE CHURCH

What is the hierarchy of the Church?

- All form one circle, the Church, each group has its own role and function. At the center of the circle is Christ himself who is present through his Body, the Church.
- **The Pope**
 - The **pope** is the universal head of the Church here on earth.
 - The pope is inspired and led by the Holy Spirit.
 - The pope holds full authority over the whole Church, together with the college of bishops.
 - The first pope was Saint Peter; the present pope is Francis. There have been 266 popes in the history of the Church.
- **Bishops**
 - The **bishops** are the successors of the Apostles.
 - Bishops work collegially, particularly in union with the pope.
 - The bishop is the center of the life in a particular Church community.
 - The bishops are entrusted to be the authentic teachers of the faith.
- **Priests & Deacons**
 - **Priests** are coworkers of the bishop.
 - A **pastor** is a priest who serves as an administrator to a particular parish community.
 - The pastor makes sure that the needs of the community are met, both spiritually and physically.
 - **Deacons** are ordained and who preach the Gospel and minister to the poor and needy.
- **Religious Life**
 - The state of consecrated life is one way of experiencing a "more intimate" consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God.
 - Those who live in religious life propose to follow Christ more nearly and to give themselves to God to proclaim the Gospel message.
 - Those in religious life typically take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to their superior.
 - Religious life in its various forms is called to signify the very charity of God in the language of our time.
- **Laity**
 - The **laity** are the faithful who are incorporated into the mission of the Church through Baptism and Confirmation.
 - The Church relies heavily on the laity to assist in making social, political, and economic realms more holy.

- Lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society.
- Every person is called to be the witness and the living instrument of the Church.

Are we just the “Jesus Club”?

- We do not just “belong” to the Church, we “become” the Church. The Church is not a club. A club is a loose association of like-minded people, gathered together for a specific purpose. The Church is a living organism, the living Body of Christ. Through baptism, we are joined to one another in a profound and intimate way.
- To belong to the Church is to enter a community of faith whose members have committed every aspect of their lives to Jesus. To be Church is to recognize and honor God everywhere and in everyone.
- If the Church is just the “Jesus Club,” then our rituals are meaningless. If the Church is the mystical Body of Christ, then our liturgy is work of God and efficacious.