

### **SESSION OBJECTIVES**

This session is presented in three parts: "One and Holy"; "Catholic and Apostolic"; and how the Church is an ordered society. After this session, you should ...

- Be able to describe the four marks of the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.
- Understand the visible structure of the Church.
- Understand the role and purpose of the Church's members, including her ordained, lay, and consecrated members.

### **GETTING YOUR BEARINGS**

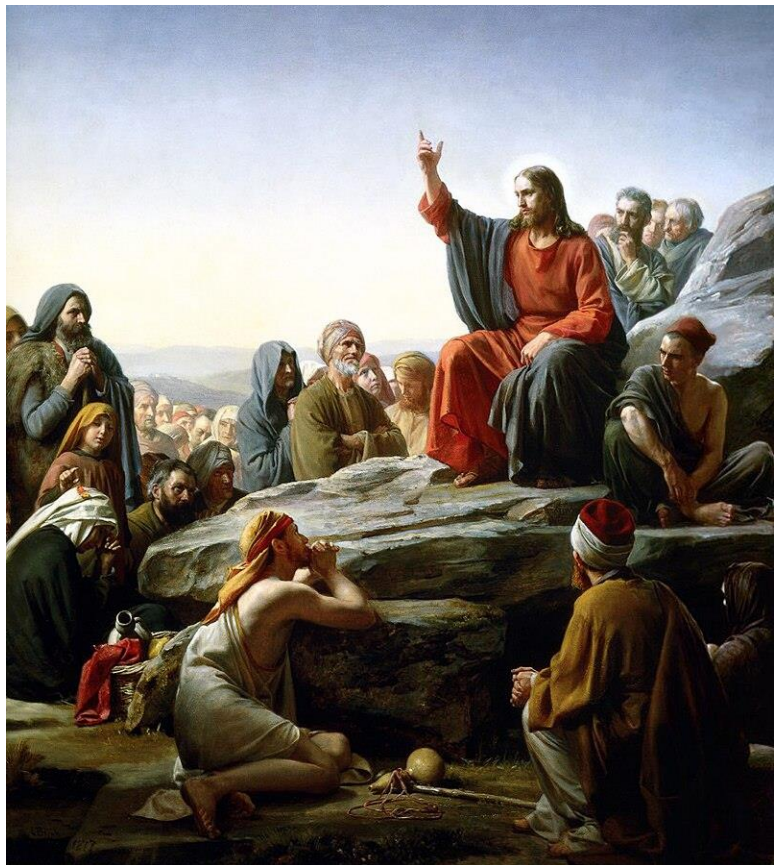
We profess at Mass the unique characteristics of the Catholic Church that set her apart when we say, "We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." These "marks" describe essential characteristics of the Church. We discuss them separately for the sake of clarity, but the *Catechism* reminds us that they are "... inseparably linked with each other ..." <sup>1</sup> (No. 811). They are not four different parts of the Church, but are each essential attributes of the same Mystical Body. Each provides a different lens or way of looking at the one Church.

Having encountered so many "threes" in our previous sessions, you might wonder why there are four marks and not three. The simple answer is that the ancient fathers of the Church, who developed our Creed under the influence of the Holy Spirit, believed that those four words adequately described the essential nature of the Church that God had given them in Jesus Christ. As you know very well by now, the number three is symbolic of God and the things of heaven. But we also commonly speak of the four directions, the four winds, the four seasons; we even speak of the four "corners" of the earth.

Four, in fact, is the number in the Jewish symbol system for the things having to do with earth, just as three is the number that symbolizes God and heaven. There are four Gospel portraits of Christ that record his earthly mission of salvation. Similarly, the Church presents these four aspects, or marks, to all who want to know her better. Given that four is the ancient symbol for the things of earth, it seems fitting that our earthly journey back to the Blessed Trinity occurs in a Church that we profess to have these four attributes.

Although there are four marks and not three, the *Catechism* often describes the marks in a series of three points to remind us that the Church's origin is the Trinity and to show that God has left his Trinitarian mark on her. For example, her unity, or "oneness;" is possessed by reason of her "source;" the divine unity in the Father; her "founder;" Jesus, who is the Word made flesh; and her "soul;" the indwelling Holy Spirit (see No. 813).

Three "... visible bonds of communion " guarantee this unity: the profession of faith, divine worship, and apostolic succession (see No. 815). Even violations of the Church's unity are summed up in a kind of anti-trinity as the sins of heresy, apostasy, and schism (see No. 817). In addition to reminding us of the Church's Trinitarian origin, these groups of three are the *Catechism's* memory aids to help us recall the important parts of our Faith. (By using these sets of three, the *Catechism* also continually reminds us that the "Trinity is the central mystery of Christian life" [see No. 234].)



In this session, we will also learn that the Church is missionary by her very nature, and that all her members share in that mission. This mission is required by her catholicity, because God intends the Church to be for all people, and by her apostolicity, because the Church is sent out to the world just as the apostles were sent. The pope and bishops, who are the successors of the apostles and representatives of the Church's hierarchy, play an important role in her mission. But all her members can and should witness to the truth of the Faith in the places where they live and work. The priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ are exercised by the non-ordained as well as the ordained, but in ways that are specific to their particular state in life. It is the call of the lay Christian to live and work according to God's plan and, by doing so, to bring the gospel to their homes, neighborhoods, and places of work.

### ***God's Love For Us ... It's Personal!***

God's love for us is not only universal; it is *personal*. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI writes, "Being human is essentially about relation to God..." He describes this personal love: "God addresses every individual by a name that no one else knows, as Scripture tells us (cf. Rev. 2:17). God's love for each individual is totally personal and includes this mystery of a uniqueness that cannot be divulged to other human beings:"

Every one of Christ's faithful have a vocation that is unique to each of them as individuals. While this vocation will fall into one of the broad categories of married, single, or consecrated life, God has placed an individual desire for him in our hearts. We live out that desire via our particular vocations. There is a diversity of ministry in the Church, but there is unity of mission (see No. 873).

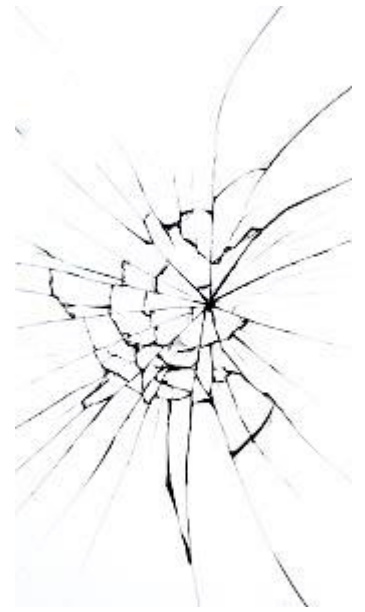
### ***Myth: The Church is filled with hypocrites, liars, thieves ... you name it!***

Actually, there is a lot of truth to this statement. To be fair, though, we need to realize that every church, organization, or group made up of sinful human beings is bound to bear the faults of the persons within it. The Second Vatican Council stated the problem well: the Church experiences "a discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted" (*Gaudium et spes*, 43).

This is nothing new, of course. St Paul, writing during the very first decades of the Church, pointed out the faults of her members in his various letters. But, despite such failings, he also recognized God working through all: "Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more ..." (Romans 5:20).

The myth here is that the Church is somehow discredited by her sinful and dysfunctional members. This simply is not true.

The Church is wedded to Christ *eternally*. The Church is the Body of Christ. By the grace and power of God, the Church still moves forward. Yes, the Church is a refuge for sinners, but she maintains an ever-present call to holiness. The Word of God revitalizes the Church. The sacraments fill her with divine graces and lead her contritely from sin to glory, "a sanctity that is real though imperfect"<sup>1</sup> (No. 825). Her saints are living proof.



## **GLOSSARY TERMS**

### **Apostolate**

The activity of a baptized Christian who works to share the gospel with the world. From the term *apostle*, which means "one who is sent;" an apostolate is any work by a baptized member of the Church that, supported and directed by her pastors, aims to advance the Church's mission of announcing the gospel and spreading the kingdom of God.

### **Apostasy**

The abandonment of the whole of the Faith by one of the baptized.

### **Canonize**

For the pope to solemnly proclaim that a particular deceased person has lived a holy life that is worthy of imitation. Such a person may be appealed to as an intercessor, since that person now resides in heaven and can address God directly.

### **Ecumenical**

Having to do with the worldwide Church, this term is often used to refer to those efforts to reunite our separated brothers and sisters (other non-Catholic Christians) to the "catholic unity of the People of God" (No. 836), the one Church founded by Christ and governed by the pope and those bishops in union with him.

### **Heresy**

From the Greek term meaning "choice;" heresy is the obstinate denial of some part of the Faith in opposition to Church teaching on the matter.

### **Hierarchy**

The apostles and their successors, including the college of bishops, who have the authority to teach and rule the Church in the name of Christ. This term also refers to those who have received the sacrament of holy orders, or ordination.

### **Religious**

Those who have made a formal profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience (and sometimes others) and who commit to certain liturgical and apostolic works in a shared or common life with others who have done the same.

### **Schism**

When an individual Christian or ecclesial body or group (for example, Eastern Orthodoxy or the Protestant churches) is not in union with the bishop of Rome.

### **Subsists**

This term is used to indicate that the Church founded by Christ endures in the Catholic Church governed by the pope and the bishops in communion with him (see Nos. 816,820).

## PRESENTATION OUTLINE

### SESSION ELEVEN: THE CHURCH'S FOUR MARKS

#### **ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC (Nos. 811-945)**

- I. **The Four Marks: “The Church Is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic”** (see No. 811)
  - A. Established in the Creed at the Council of Constantinople (AD 381)
  - B. Essential features that characterize and distinguish the Church (see No. 811)
  - C. “... Christ ... makes his Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic ...” (No. 811)
  - D. Can be recognized through both faith and reason (see No. 812)
  
- II. **The Church Is One** (Nos. 813-822)
  - A. God is the source of the Church's unity (see No. 813)
    1. The Church's unity has a threefold character: God is its source, founder, and soul
    2. A Trinitarian reflection
  
  - B. Twofold unity of the Church
    1. Interiorly united; it has cohesion (see No. 813, 814)
    2. It is uniquely one, singular; “... the sole Church ...” founded by Christ (see No. 816)
      - a. Peter and his successors are a visible sign of unity
      - b. The pope both represents and guarantees the Church's unity
  
  - C. Visible bonds of communion: faith, worship, and apostolic succession (see No. 815)
  
  - D. Wounds to unity (see No. 817)
    1. Heresy
    2. Schism
    3. Apostasy

E. Toward unity: “something she can never lose” (No. 820)

F. Seven principles for ecumenism, for promoting the growth of unity (see No. 821)

### **III. The Church Is Holy** (see Nos. 823-829)

A. “Charity is the soul of holiness ...” (No. 826)

B. Through and with Christ: “The Church ... is ... unfailingly holy” (No. 823)

C. The “fullness of the means of salvation” lies in the Church (No. 824)

D. The Church's sanctity is “real though imperfect” in her members (see No. 825)

E. St. Therese of Lisieux: "LOVE... IS THE VOCATION WHICH INCLUDES ALL OTHERS ..." (No. 826)

F. The saints in every age are evidence of the Church's holiness (see No. 828)

### **IV. The Church Is Catholic** (see Nos. 830-856)

A. *Catholic* means “universal;” “according to the whole”; expressed in two senses:

1. The Church possesses the “fullness of the means of salvation” (No. 830)

2. The Church's mission is “to the whole of the human race” (No. 831)

B. Each “particular church” (diocese) is catholic (see No. 833) through its union with Rome (see No. 834)

C. “Those 'who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church:” (No. 838)

D. The Church and non-Christians (see Nos. 839-845)

E. *“Outside the Church there is no salvation”*

1. The *Catechism* re-formulates positively: “[A]ll salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body ..” (No. 846)

2. The *Catechism* explains how those “... with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace ... may achieve eternal salvation” (No. 847)

F. The Church is missionary by nature (see Nos. 849-856)

**V. "The Church Is Apostolic"** (see Nos. 857-862)

A. The Church is apostolic in three ways

1. Apostolic foundation - The apostles were "chosen and sent ... "by Christ himself" (No. 857)
2. Apostolic Deposit - "... the Church keeps and hands on the teaching from the apostles" (No. 857)
3. Apostolic Succession - The bishops, "assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter"

B. The apostolate of the Church (see Nos. 863-865)

1. Every member of the Church is called to the apostolate (see No. 863)
2. In the Church, "the Kingdom of heaven ... already exists and will be fulfilled at the end of time" (No. 865)

**VI. An Ordered Society: The Magisterium of the Church**

A. "Christ's Faithful-Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life": all"... become sharers of Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal office ..." (No. 871)

B. The Magisterium, the Church's teaching office (see Nos. 888-892)

1. Ordinary Magisterium = the pope and the bishops united with him teach "in matters of faith and morals" (No. 892)
2. Universal Ordinary Magisterium = teachings not formally defined but constantly taught and believed throughout the history of the Church
3. Extraordinary Magisterium = when an ecumenical council declares a revealed dogma of the Faith, ratified by the pope; or when the pope formally defines an *ex cathedra* doctrine (see No. 891)

C. Many Church teachings have never been disputed; no need for a solemn definition.

## **PART 4: GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. "The Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her" (No. 820). No. 821 outlines requirements for these tasks. In what specific ways have you observed the Church praying and working for unity? What might you do to strengthen the unity of the Church?
2. In the face of sin and scandal, some would argue that the Church is not particularly holy. How does the *Catechism* explain the holiness of the Church despite the admission that her members are sinners? In what way has the Church contributed to your own holiness?
3. No. 846 affirms the ancient saying, "Outside the Church there is no salvation" and explains how this seemingly exclusive claim should be understood positively. Do you find the explanation helpful? How would you explain this point to a Catholic friend who contends that it really doesn't matter to which religion you belong?
4. No. 847 explains how those who have not heard the gospel might achieve salvation. Do you know any people who might fit into this category? Do you think that the Church has any specific obligation toward such people, and if so, what do you think you could or should do for them?
5. No. 890 describes infallibility as a gift at the service of the People of God. Why is this gift so important? What might be the consequences of not having such a gift? How has the gift of infallibility been a benefit to you?
6. No. 901 indicates that one of the ways in which the lay faithful participate in the priestly office of Christ is by patiently enduring the hardships of life and making of them spiritual sacrifices. How do you strive to patiently bear suffering and hardships, and what difference does it make when you succeed? In what way do you see value for others in such offerings?

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### **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Lord God, we thank you for the gift you have given us of the visible Church founded by Christ on the rock of Peter that has the apostles as her foundation stones. Keep us always in union with our pastors, and continue to guide them in their mission of ruling, sanctifying, and teaching the faithful. Grant that we might live fully the gifts of our baptismal priesthood, witness to the Faith by our self-mastery, and exercise a proper dominion over the created gifts you have given us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**HOMEWORK QUESTIONS**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

From the *Catechism* Nos. 811-829

1. What are the four "marks" or characteristics, of the Church?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where alone can the fullness of the means of salvation be obtained?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the end toward which all the activities of the Church are directed?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 830-870

4. What does the word "catholic" mean?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is another name for a "particular church" in the Roman Catholic Church?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. The *Catechism* mentions two non-Catholic peoples who are related to the People of God in various ways. Which of these non-Christian faiths is "already a response to God's revelation"? Which non-Christian people claim to hold to the faith of Abraham?

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7. What does the *Catechism* say about those who, "knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it?"

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8. To whom does the *Catechism* refer when it says, "whoever listens to them is listening to Christ"?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 871-896

9. Which three offices of Christ do the Christian faithful share?

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10. Who is "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity"?

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11. What does the Roman Pontiff exercise when he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals?

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12. What is the center of the life of the particular Church?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 897-945

13. In what special way do parents share in the office of sanctifying?

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14. What are the three professions of evangelical counsels that characterize a life consecrated to God?

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15. What does the consecrated virgin become an image of?

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