

OUTLINE: CATHOLICISM EPISODE 6

I. The Mystery of the Church

- A. Can you define “Church” in a single sentence?
- B. The Church is not a human invention; in Christ, “like a sacrament”
- C. The Church is a Body, a living organism
 - 1. “I am the vine and you are the branches” (Jn. 15)
 - 2. The Mystical Body of Christ (*Mystici Corporis Christi*, by Pius XII)
 - 3. Jesus to Saul: “Why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:3-4)
 - 4. Joan of Arc: The Church and Christ are “one thing”

II. *Ekklesia*

- A. God created the world for communion with him (CCC, par. 760)
- B. Sin scatters; God gathers
 - 1. God calls man into the unity of his family and household (CCC, par. 1)
 - 2. God calls man out of the world
- C. The Church takes Christ’s life to the nations
 - 1. Proclamation and evangelization (*Lumen Gentium*, 33)
 - 2. Renewal of the temporal order (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 13)

III. Four Marks of the Church

- A. One
 - 1. The Church is one because God is One
 - 2. The Church works to unite the world in God
 - 3. The Church works to heal divisions (ecumenism)
- B. Holy
 - 1. The Church is holy because her Head, Christ, is holy
 - 2. The Church contains sinners, but is herself holy
 - 3. The Church is made holy by God’s grace
- C. Catholic
 - 1. *Kata holos* = “according to the whole”
 - 2. The Church is the new Israel, universal
 - 3. The Church transcends cultures, languages, nationalism

D. Apostolic

1. From the lives, witness, and teachings of the apostles
2. The Church hands on Tradition
3. The Church is hierarchical, governed by priests
4. Divine revelation and the development of doctrine
 - i. No new divine revelation
 - ii. Development of doctrine is about growth, not change
 - iii. The Church is the servant of the Word of God

LESSON 6: THE MYSTICAL UNION OF CHRIST & THE CHURCH

The Mystery of the Church

“Christians of the first centuries said, ‘The world was created for the sake of the Church.’ God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the ‘convocation’ of men in Christ, and this ‘convocation’ is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things, and God permitted such painful upheavals as the angels’ fall and man’s sin only as occasions and means for displaying all the power of his arm and the whole measure of the love he wanted to give the world: Just as God’s will is creation and is called ‘the world,’ so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called ‘the Church.’”

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 760.

“For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every form of grace, for the Spirit is truth.”

– St. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (3, 24, I).

What is the Church? If you had to define “the Church” in a single sentence, what would you say? Is it an institution, a structure, a gathering, a community, a people? All of the above, and more?

In saying the Nicene Creed, we profess belief in God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We profess belief in the Trinity, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. But we also profess, “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” Isn’t this a case of putting faith in a human institution, a deeply flawed organization? Some non-Catholic Christians might wonder, “Aren’t you confusing the Creator with the creature? Isn’t believing *in* the Church bordering on blasphemous?”

It would indeed be an outrageous thing to express such a belief if the Church was merely a human construct, the invention of men. But the Church is not a human invention. The Church “is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument,” states *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, “both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race...” (par. 1). The Church participates uniquely in the life and power of Jesus Christ. It is, St. Paul explained to the Christians at Corinth, the body of Christ: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:12, 27).

So the Church is not a club, nor simply an institution, or even a gathering of like-minded people. It is a body, a living organism, made up of interdependent cells, molecules, and organs. Each member of the Church is linked organically to Christ, the Head, and to each other.

Ekklesia

“But as it is,” Paul explained, “God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:18-20).

Jesus used powerful images to describe this organic, cohesive whole. Drawing on the rich imagery of the prophets, he said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). He shocked many of his disciples when he said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...” (Jn. 6:53). Such deliberate remarks demonstrate that Jesus did not consider himself to be a mere teacher or moral guide, but someone much greater. Someone might admire a great leader, such as Abraham Lincoln, or study and emulate a teacher such as Gandhi, but would anyone speak of eating the flesh of Lincoln or “abiding” in Gandhi?

Yet this is the language of Jesus and Scripture, and it tells us that we are members of a mystical body. Pope Pius XII, in his great encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, given in 1943, wrote:

If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ—which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church—we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression “the Mystical Body of Christ”—an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers (par. 13).

This mystical union is revealed in various ways in the New Testament. For example, in Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of his mystical body in exhorting his followers to a radical life of love: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me,” and “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Matt. 25:40, 45). This goes beyond identifying certain behaviors as right or wrong, for Jesus says that helping one another has something profound to do *with him*. Giving bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, visiting the imprisoned, counseling the doubtful, bringing peace—each is an act of service to Christ. Failure to treat others with this self-sacrificial love is to harm and turn Jesus away.

Another dramatic example is found in the account of Saul’s conversion in the Acts of the Apostles. “Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” (Acts 9:3-4). Jesus didn’t ask, “Why are you persecuting my followers or my apostles or my Church?” No, he says, “Me.” And when Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?”, he received this reply: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). Jesus identifies himself intimately with the Church and her sufferings.

St. Joan of Arc, while being interrogated at her trial, said, “About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter.” In this, she echoed St. Augustine, who put it just as directly: “Christ and the Church are two in one flesh” (*In Ps.* 142, 3). Recognizing this unity is essential in approaching the mystery of the Church.

The Church is the culmination of God’s salvific actions and the means by which men are to enter into the divine life. “God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life,” states the *Catechism*, “a communion brought about by the ‘convocation’ of men in Christ, and this ‘convocation’ is the Church” (par. 760). The Church “is nothing other than ‘the family of God’” (par. 1655), which is a distinctive and remarkable belief.

To appreciate this more deeply, recall that God is a great gathering force and a community of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because all things are created by God, all things are linked to one another. So whatever is opposed to God is a source of dissolution and division. One of Satan’s principle names in the New Testament is *ho diabolos*, a term derived from the Greek word *diabalein*, which means “to scatter.” Sin has scattered man, tearing him away from God and introducing strife and discord within the human race. God’s response to this sin and scattering was to engage in a great act of gathering. As we’ve already seen, this came through the call to Abraham, the establishment of covenants, and the creation of the people of Israel. They were made distinctive through the covenants and the Law, by liturgy and a particular way of life that was aimed at holiness and communion with God.

The purpose of this gathering of a people of God was not for Israel’s own glory, but so the chosen people would be the first born of many sons (see Ex. 4:22; CCC, 238)—that is, Israel would attract and draw together the whole world into the knowledge and worship of Yahweh. The establishment and maintaining of the distinctiveness of Israel was not *against* the world, but *for* the world. This work of gathering, of course, did not always go well; there was often disobedience, discord, idolatry, jealousy, and apathy.

“But when the time had fully come,” St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). The Son, Jesus Christ, was the culmination of God’s plan of salvation; he was the fulfillment of Israel, the perfection of the Law, the covenants, the prophets, and the Jewish liturgy. He was a supernatural magnet: “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32). Jesus gathers; he carries out the Father’s mission to “call together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church” (CCC, 1).

Standing outside of Caesarea Philippi before the towering cliff that housed the many altars of pagan gods, Jesus told Peter, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my *ekklesia*, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). This word, *ekklesia*, comes from two Greek terms—*ek* and *kaleo*—which mean “to call out,” referring to a called people, an assembly. The Church is that society called out of one way of life into another way of living, set apart to be filled with another life.

This raises three key questions: Who does the calling? What are we called *from*? And what are we called *into*? In our modern culture, in Western society, we join organizations and gain memberships; we decide what groups we wish to participate in and be part of. But it is different with the Church, for we are called and summoned by someone else. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,” wrote St. Peter in his second epistle, “through the knowledge of him *who called us to his own glory and excellence*, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that

through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:3-4; emphasis added). God calls, God grants, God saves. We are called to be sons and daughters who do his work and serve him as loving children. We belong to someone else. We are, by God’s grace, “called and chosen and faithful” (Rev. 17:14); we are, as Paul states, “slaves of God” (Rom. 6:22) and “a slave of Christ” (1 Cor. 7:22).

We have been called out of what Scripture calls “the world,” a word with specific connotations. The world stands against God; it is the realm of opposition to God. The world is filled with hatred, violence, pride, self-obsession, rivalry, jealousy, institutional corruption. As members of the *ekklesia*, we have been summoned out of this realm of spiritual death. “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

The Church maintains its distinctiveness, again, not because it is opposed to the world but because it was established for the sake of the world. The Church is meant to bring man into communion with God. Monsignor Romano Guardini expressed this beautifully in his book, *The Church of the Lord*:

The content of the Church is Christ. In preserving Him she preserves herself, for without Him she is nothing. In understanding Him and His message she understands herself, for it is He who constitutes the meaning of her existence. In handing Him on to men she herself lives, for even though she exercises the most varied cultural influences in the course of history, her essential lifework consists in bringing the reality of Christ into our existence. (Henry Regency Co.; Chicago [1966], p. 73)

The Church has often been likened to a ship, to Noah’s ark, bringing men safely through the terrors and trials of life. Just as Noah threw open the doors and windows of the ark after the waters had finally receded, the *ekklesia* is not supposed to remain hunkered down and fearful. It is called to boldly take the divine life of Christ to the nations.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that this work of proclamation and evangelization is to be embraced wholeheartedly by the laity. By bringing the Church to the world, the laity brings the world into contact with the Church, the Body of Christ:

The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, and especially by the Eucharist, that love of God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. The laity, however, are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth. Thus, every lay person, through those gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself “according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal.” (Lumen Gentium, 33)

The Council, in fact, was a renewal intended to aid Catholics in rediscovering the Church’s goals and focus in the modern world. The mission of the Church never changes, but our understanding of how to best live it in a specific culture does develop, deepen, and change. That mission, according to *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, is to proclaim Jesus Christ and to fill the temporal order with the light and salt of the Gospel; the laity have an essential role in this task:

Christ’s redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, initially on earth and completely on the last day. In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5).

The Council Fathers taught that “the laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation,” being led by the “light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity.” This involves a permeation of culture, of society and of all aspects of the kingdom of man with the “higher principles of the Christian life” (AA, 7). This task is not the priority of priests or religious. The laity, because of their skills in the marketplace, in the institutions of society, and in the everyday activities of men, can perform this crucial activity in a much-needed and primary way. “The apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 13).

Lay people, in other words, have a specific vocation; they are called by the Father to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in gathering together mankind into the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Four Marks: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

The Church, the Creed states, is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” These four characteristics, remarks the *Catechism*, “inseparably linked with each other, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities” (par. 811). Here are some reflections on these four marks in light of what we have already considered regarding the nature of the Church.

The Church is one because God is one. “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is Lord alone” (Deut. 6:4). The *shema* from the book of Deuteronomy is the most sacred prayer in Judaism. It is echoed in the opening line of the Creed: “*credo in unum Deum.*” St. Cyprian, writing in the third century, said, “God is one and Christ is one: there is one church and one chair founded, by the Lord’s authority, on Peter” (*Letter*, 43.5).

The Church must be one, for its whole purpose is to unite the world around the one God. Jesus, in his great high priestly prayer prior to the Last Supper, prayed:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me (Jn. 17:21-23).

This emphasis on unity is bothersome to some people. Isn't it, they wonder, a bit imperialistic, exclusive, and overbearing? We live, after all, in a culture that stresses the importance of diversity, tolerance, and uniqueness. There are many different religions and philosophies; people, including Christians, disagree about nearly everything. Isn't this threatened by the Catholic teaching on the unity of the Church?

The Catholic Church has possessed, from the very beginning, a healthy and creative way of dealing with this important issue. It is rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ is not just one of many interesting religious figures, but is the *Logos*, the second person of the Trinity. Since this is so, whatever is good, true, and beautiful in other religions, philosophies, or cultures can find its home within the Church of Christ. Tertullian may have scoffed, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" but the history of Christian thought is one of constant interaction with and consideration of other theologies and philosophies. Origen, Augustine, and Ambrose used the philosophies of Plato and Plotinus to illumine the faith. Thomas Aquinas made extensive use of Aristotle, Averroes, Avicenna, and many others. At its best, the Catholic tradition reverences philosophy. So much so that the only reason we are able today to read Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, or Julius Caesar is because Catholic monks copied and preserved their works down through the centuries.

And what about other religions? *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, says,

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (par. 2)

And *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Council's decree on ecumenism—that is, relations with non-Catholic Christians—opens with a reflection on Christ's words, "that they all may be one," and laments the "rifts" and "dissensions" that have separated Christians from one another. It frankly notes the serious disagreements that still exist, but then states:

Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ. (par. 3)

All truth leads back to Christ, for he is, he declared, "the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:16). And he has only one Church, for he has but one Bride.

The Church is holy because Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, is holy. It is holy because the Church is Christ's body. "We believe in the holy church," St. Peter Chrysologus wrote, "because the church is in Christ, and Christ is in the church" (*Sermon*, 60:14).

The Church reveals and brings the holiness of Christ to the world. This is accomplished through liturgy and Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), the witness of saints and martyrs, the proclamation of Scripture, adherence to Sacred Tradition, teaching and preaching, art and architecture, and much more. This is the Church's entire purpose: to make saints, to make people holy. Everything it does and everything it has is devoted to that end.

"It is difficult to conceive any proposition," wrote Ronald Knox in *The Church on Earth* about the holiness of the Church, "that would call forth more indignant protests from non-Catholics and more demands of explanation from Catholic themselves" (Sophia Institute Press, 2003 [Orig. 1929], p. 21). Issues immediately arise; questions are asked. "What about the far less than holy things that the Church has done and continues to do in the world?" One hears a litany of historical examples supposedly proving the tainted and corrupt, if not overtly evil, nature of the Church: the Crusades, the Inquisition, the persecution of Galileo, the burning of witches, the opposition to modern political reforms, the support of slavery, institutional corruption, too much wealth and worldly preoccupations, and in recent years, the abuse of children by priests and the countenancing of this by some bishops.

Given such a list of abuses, how can we possibly speak of the Church as holy? First, to say that the Church is holy is not to deny for a moment that the Church is filled with sinners. To say that the Church is holy is not to deny for a moment that sons and daughters of the Church—even those of the highest rank—have done all sorts of cruel, stupid, and sinful things. But this does not mean the Church is not the bearer of grace. St. Augustine, in battling the Donatists in the fourth century, brought this fact to the fore. The Donatists believed that only morally pure priests could validly celebrate the sacraments and be real conduits of grace. But Augustine opposed Donatism, insisting that even unrighteous priests and sinful bishops can validly administer the sacraments. It is God's holiness and grace that guarantees the sacraments, not the moral uprightness of the priest. Paul's words remind us that all we have is a gift from God:

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:5-7).

We are "earthen vessels," flawed, fragile, unimpressive; the real power belongs to God alone. The history of the Church bears witness to this fact. God's grace—which makes the church holy—has come through very weak, sometimes sinful, channels. The Church, Knox explained, "is a faultless society in the sense that her organization is perfectly designed to lead her members to perfection if they will" (*The Church on Earth*, 24).

The Church is Catholic. The word "catholic" comes from the Greek terms *kata holos*, which means "according to the whole." The Catholic Church is a universal church, for God works to gather the whole world unto himself. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the fourth century, expressed it profoundly in his *Catechetical Discourses*:

[The Church] is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins, which are committed by soul or body, and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts (Lecture 18; par. 23).

The Catholic Church is the new Israel (cf. Gal. 6:16), and hence is a magnet attracting Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, young and old. When Pilate put the sign, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," over the cross of Jesus he made sure it was stated in the three major languages of the day. Ironically, because of it, he became thereby the first evangelist of the Catholic Church. At Pentecost, the frightened but expectant disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and the first thing they did was to preach with power and courage in the tongues of the many nations (Acts 2). Jews from all over the world heard them in their own languages, thereby reversing the curse of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

The Catholic Church, at its best, has always exulted in this universality, this surprising ability to transcend cultures, languages, and national identities. So, for example, in the Middle Ages, an Italian such as Anselm could become a monk and abbot in France and then end his life as the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. Thomas Aquinas, another Italian, could be educated in Germany and become a world-renowned professor in Paris.

The apostles, Karl Adam noted in *The Spirit of Catholicism*, did not see the Church "as one particular sect, but as a society embracing the whole of redeemed humanity. The Church is not an institution to be established within humanity, which for that reason introduces new lines of division and produces a sectional organization and a sort of new synagogue. On the contrary, it is so world-wide in its nature that it breaks down all barriers and all divisions. It is as big and as wide as humanity itself" (New York, 1948 [rev. ed.], pp. 166-7).

Finally, the Church is apostolic. That is, it is from the apostles, from the confession of Peter and the teaching of the other original disciples of Jesus. The Church is not a club, philosophical society, or political movement, but a body of men and women gathered by, for, and around a very particular man, Jesus, whom the apostles knew.

This is why apostolic succession is so important; it is the claim that the bishops of the Church derive their office and authority from the apostles themselves. They have not been elected by the people; they have been ordained by other bishops who themselves were ordained by other bishops, going all the way back to apostolic times. *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, states:

In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts (par. 7).

The Apostles then handed on, by preaching, personal example, and observances, what they had been told by Christ, what they had learned from living with him and witnessing his example. "But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over' to them 'the authority to teach in their own place'" (par. 7). In this way, apostolic preaching—which is expressed in a unique and special manner in the inspired books of the New Testament—"was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3)" (par. 8).

In his letters to Timothy, his "son in the faith," Paul remarks about the laying on of hands, the gesture by which the leaders of the ancient Church were chosen and empowered. "Do not neglect the gift you have," the Apostle exhorted the young leader, "which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you" (1 Tim. 4:14). The bishops, in turn, ordain priests and deacons by the laying on of hands. This is why we speak of the apostolic Church as being hierarchical (*hieros* = "sacred"; *arche* = "head, first place"), that is, a Church governed by priests.

The Church would not be the Church if it were to deny the Creed and the truths contained within it. "The Church's universal mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-- and the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son, as the saving event for all humanity" (*Dominus Iesus*, par 1). The history of the Church is filled, sadly, with men who have denied, skewed, and distorted Church teaching about the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection, and many other truths. If the validity of these doctrines was simply put up to a vote by the faithful or theologians, the Church would lose integrity.

A related and common question is "Why does the Church today look so different from the church in ancient times? If the apostolic teaching has been passed down faithfully from generation to generation, how do we explain the wild complexity of the tradition and what appear to be novelties of all kinds?" These questions were raised by many of the Protestant leaders the sixteenth century, but the issue had been around for much longer. Writing around 450, Vincent of Lerins explained that an authentic development of doctrine is not a matter of creation, but of clarification:

But perhaps someone is saying, Will there then be no progress of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly there is...but it is truly progress and not a change of faith. What is meant by progress is that something is brought to an advancement within itself; by change, that something is transformed from one thing into another (Commonitoria 23, 28).

The most famous, and arguably most influential, explanation of this progress is found in John Henry Newman's classic work, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, first published in 1845. Newman began writing the book while an Anglican, but in the course of his study he discovered that his arguments against the Catholic Church were crumbling (he entered the Church and was eventually made a cardinal). Many of Newman's detailed and brilliant arguments are summarized by his statement that "I have maintained that modern Catholicism is nothing else but simply the legitimate growth and compliment, that is, the natural and necessary development, of the doctrine of the early church, and that its divine authority is included in the divinity of Christianity" (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949, p. 157). Along the same lines, the *Catechism* emphatically teaches that there is no new public revelation between the death of the Apostles and the return of Christ, but "even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its

full significance over the course of the centuries” (par. 66).

Divine revelation, because it is supernatural and of God, cannot ever be completely grasped and understood by man, who is finite and limited. Yet the Church, in order to better understand, explain, and present the truths of divine revelation, works to clarify and focus the endless riches contained in that revelation. This process, far from being a corruption of revelation, is at the service of that revelation, for the Church is the servant of the Word of God (cf. CCC, 86). In this context we can better understand the role and authority of the bishops and the Pope. Newman saw that it is precisely *because* doctrine develops that there is a need for a living voice of authority to determine the difference between legitimate developments and corruptions.

“He cannot have God for his Father,” wrote St. Cyprian, “who has not the Church for his mother.” Henri de Lubac, who wrote some of the greatest works on ecclesiology in the past century, put it bluntly: “the Church is our mother. We would not be Christians if we did not acknowledge in her this essential characteristic” (*The Motherhood of the Church* [Ignatius Press, 1982], p. 75). She is the spiritual mother who gives us new birth through baptism, feeds us with the Word of God, teaches us the Faith, nourishes us with the Body and Blood of her head, Jesus Christ (CCC, 169, 171, 181).

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING:

1. What does the *Catechism* mean in stating, “The world was created for the sake of the Church” (par. 760)? How is the Church “the goal of all things”? What is the relationship between the world and the Church? (CCC 760, 168-9)

2. What are some of the biblical images or names used to describe or name the Church? (CCC 753, 756)

3. How is the Church “in Christ, like a sacrament”? What is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church? (CCC 774)

5. What are the four “marks” of the Church? How is the Church “one”? (CCC 811-16)

4. How is the Church “in Christ like a sacrament”? What is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church (CCC 774)?

6. How can it be said that the Church is holy when there are so many examples of sinful Catholics? (CCC 825)

7. What does “catholic” mean? In what ways is the Church “apostolic”? (CCC 830, 831, 857-63, 865)

8. What is the difference between doctrine *changing* and doctrine *developing*? What is the “deposit of faith,” and how does it relate to the development of doctrine? (CCC 66, 78, 84-85, 94-95)

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION:

1. What are some of the common misrepresentations of the nature and mission of the Church you encounter? Which are the most difficult to counter or respond to? Why?

2. Is it sometimes difficult to see the Church as a supernatural body established by Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls? If so, why? What can you do to better appreciate the supernatural character of the Church?

3. The word “ekklesia” means “to call out.” Who does the calling? From what have you been called? To what are you being called? How can you better hear and respond to the call?

4. What does the word “evangelization” bring to mind? What are some ways in which you have evangelized, or could evangelize? What are some steps you can take to evangelize better, or more often?

5. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the laity “must taken up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation.” What can you do to take part in this renewal? What challenges will you face in that work? How can you overcome those challenges?

6. How might studying and reflecting on the four marks of the Church increase both your understanding of the Church and your love for her?

TERMS AND NAMES:

Apostolate: From the word “apostle,” it refers to work accomplished on the behalf of Christ and the Church, especially (but not limited to) to such work carried out by the laity.

Aristotle (c. 384-c. 322). Greek philosopher who was a student of Plato (a student of Socrates) and tutor of Alexander the Great. A key figure in Western philosophy, Aristotle wrote about metaphysics, music, logic, politics, ethics, biology, and many other subjects.

Cyril of Jerusalem, Saint (c. 315-387). Bishop of Jerusalem and Doctor of the Church. He is known for his defense against Arianism and his rich works of catechetical instruction, *Catecheses* and *Mystagogic*.

De Lubac, Henri (1896-1991). Influential French Jesuit theologian who is noted for his translations of early Church and medieval writings and works about ecclesiology, the interpretation of Scripture, and the relationship between grace and nature. He was named a Cardinal by Pope John Paul II, with whom he had a long friendship.

Donatists: Schismatics in Africa who, in the fourth century, broke away from the Catholic Church. Donatism was separatist and rigorist in character, insisting that a priest must be perfectly holy in order to validly celebrate and administer the sacraments.

Ecclesiology: From the Greek word, “ekklesia,” from which is derived the word “church” (via the Germanic languages). The theological study of the origin, nature, and mission of the Church.

Ecumenism: From the Greek word referring to “the inhabited world,” this is the movement and pursuit of authentic unity between the Catholic Church and those Christian churches or groups not yet in full, visible unity with her. Ecumenism takes various forms, ranging from informal interaction to formal dialogue.

Joan of Arc, Saint (c. 1412-1431 A.D.). A peasant girl who claimed divine guidance and led the French army to important victories during the Hundred Years’ War.

Logos: The source of all intelligibility. It is the sacred reality that is the source of beauty, goodness and truth. Christ is the *Logos Incarnate*, the Word made Flesh.

Newman, Saint John Henry, (1801-90). Cardinal, Saint, theologian, and author who was the most famous convert from Anglicanism in the nineteenth century. Newman entered the Catholic Church in 1845, and wrote on subjects including Church history, faith, philosophy, and ecclesiology.

Satan: Of Hebrew origin, meaning “adversary” or someone who plots opposition to another. Satan is a heavenly creature who is in complete opposition to God and who seeks to ruin His work. He is also called Beelzebub (Mk. 3:22; Matt 10:25; 12: 24), the evil one (Matt. 13:19; Jn 17:15; 1 Jn. 5:18, 19), the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30), the great dragon (Rev. 12:9), the serpent, or serpent of old (2 Cor. 11:3; Rev 12:9, 14, 14; 20:2), and the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). He is also called “the Devil” (Matt. 4:1; 25:41; Lk. 4:2; Jn. 13:2; Acts 10:38), which derives from the Greek word *diabolos* (Latin, *diabolus*), which also means “slanderer” or “accuser.”

Wojtyla, Karol/ Blessed John Paul II (1920-2005 A.D.). The Polish pope who has been acclaimed as one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century.

Vatican II, The Council (1962-1965 A.D.): The 21st Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church that was meant to reinvigorate the Church’s evangelical mission to the modern world.

