

greater good and that of the Church, we seek from the saints 'example in their way of life, fellowship in their communion, and the help of their intercession'." (L.G. 5 1)

Our Lady:

Mary, the Mother of God, has been redeemed in a more exalted fashion by reason of the merits of her Son. Mary serves as a model for Catholics as she committed herself whole-heartedly to God's saving will, and to the person and work of her Son, Jesus Christ. Her intercession, which has been a constant aid and protection for Catholics, began during her Son's public ministry at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn. 2:1-11). In a unique way, the Virgin co-operated in the work of the Lord in restoring supernatural life to souls; therefore, she is the mother of all in the order of grace. (L.G. 6 1) Authority in the Church regulates veneration of Mary to ensure that the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is known, loved and glorified. In this, the Church teaches Catholics to pattern their lives after Mary, and to seek her motherly care and guidance.

The Call to Holiness:

Everyone in the Church is called to holiness. In the words of St. Paul: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification. " (1 Thess. 4:3) By this "holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society." (L.G. 4 0) "... love, as the bond of perfection.... governs, gives meaning to and perfects all the means of sanctification. Hence the true disciple of Christ is marked by love both of God and his neighbour. " (L.G. 42)*

Fr. Kevin Beach.

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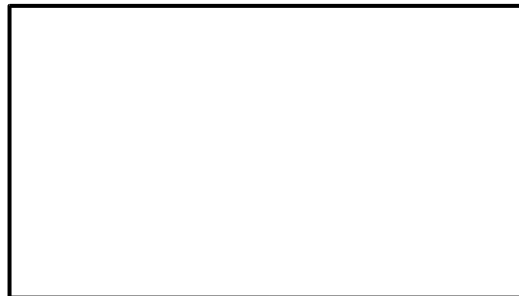
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What is the Catholic Church Anyway?



"God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world His only Son so that we could have life through him.... " (1 Jn.4:9).

God's Son, Jesus Christ is believed by Catholics to be God, the Lord and Saviour of all humanity. To continue His saving presence and message through history, Jesus founded a Church which is visible in the Roman Catholic Church. Catholics believe that the Church will continue her mission until the end of the world when Jesus himself will come again.

The Lord bestowed a special gift of teaching on Peter and the other Apostles, which continues in their successors, the Pope and bishops (the "Magisterium"). They teach on matters of faith and morals in a variety of ways. One of the most solemn is an ecumenical council. The most recent council was the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965 (the "Council"). The remaining remarks in this article will be drawn from the Council's teaching on the Church found in the document Lumen Genitum ("L.G."), latin for "light of humanity".

The Mystery of the Church:

In the Council's words, "*Christ is the light of humanity*" (L.G. 1). After Jesus' visible mission on earth, God the Father gathered together in a Church those who would believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, completing the work of the triune God, "*dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful*" *guiding the Church in the way of all truth* (L.G. 2, & 4, cf. Jn. 16:13). God provides gifts of ministry in His Church so that each may serve toward the goal of fullness in God.

Just as Jesus was the visible communication of God's love, so Jesus communicates through the Church's visible structure. The Church's mystical, divine nature is bound to its social structure. How else may God reveal Himself with certainty except through that which is accessible to the human person?

The Council teaches that elements of holiness and truth are present outside the visible structures of the Catholic Church, yet it is certain that the Church founded by Christ "*subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter (the Pope) and by the Bishops in communion with him.*" (L.G. 8). There is an unbroken succession of popes, 265 in number, from Peter the Apostle to Benedict XVI.

In her mission, the Church embraces with her love those in misery and recognizes in the poor and suffering the image of her founder. In gathering sinners, the Church acknowledges the paradox of her holiness and her constant need of purification. In all this, she is called to reveal to the world the mystery of her Lord until the full light of His second coming.

The People of God:

Anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to Him (Acts 10:35). Further, God desired, and desires people to serve Him in holiness, to respond to a call to perfection in the spiritual and moral life. From the ancient covenant with Israel, God has moved in our time to a new and perfect covenant through Christ creating a new People of God, the Church.

The People of God share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe that, through the varying gifts of the Holy Spirit, the one priesthood is shared by the ministerial priesthood and the royal priesthood of the people in different ways. The ministerial priesthood, exercised by the bishops and clergy joined to them, forms and governs the priestly people. The ministerial priesthood, in the person of Christ, effects the eucharistic sacrifice, the Holy Mass. They offer this sacrifice of Christ to God in the people's name. The royal priesthood of all believers participates in this offering. They enter and strengthen the new covenant of Christ by reception of the sacraments, prayer, the witness of holy life, penance and active charity (L.G. 10).

The People of God share in Christ's prophetic office through which others are called to holiness of life. The people of God, in furtherance of the faith of Christ, guided by the teaching office of the Church, receive the Word of God, penetrate it more deeply and apply it to their lives more fully. To further the mission of Christ in His Church, individual members receive gifts from the Holy Spirit. It is the role of those in authority among the People of God to judge the genuineness and proper use of those gifts so that the Church's mission is truly served.

The Catholic Church is joined in many ways to other Christians and to those, who do not know Christ, yet seek God with a sincere heart and follow the dictates of conscience. Catholics are called to purification and renewal "... so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the Church...." (L.G. 15 & 16). In so doing, believers seek to fulfill Christ's command that all be united in the love of God.

The Church is Hierarchical:

To shepherd His people, Christ set up offices for the good of all. He entrusted the Apostles with the mission to proclaim, as He did, the Kingdom of God. Jesus willed that Bishops, as successors to the Apostles, be Shepherds in His Church to the end of time. For unity among bishops, Christ put Peter, and his successors (the Popes), as head. In the office of Peter, the Church has a visible source and foundation of unity. The Pope and

bishops, exercising the Holy Spirit's gift of truth, may teach without error on matters of faith and morals.

The bishop is called through consecration to sanctify, teach and govern his Church. Among the more important duties of the bishop, that of preaching the Gospel has pride of place (L.G. 25).

The Laity:

The People of God is the laity, religious and clergy. All participate in the "*the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world.*" (L.G. 30) "*By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.*" (L.G. 31) It is in their daily lives and family that the laity contribute to the sanctification of the world.

The laity have the right to receive the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the Word of God and the sacraments. Pastors are to encourage the laity to undertake works on their own initiative. Those in authority in the Church must respect the freedom which belongs to all in political and social matters. (L.G. 37)

The Pilgrim Church:

"The Church, to which we are called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things." (L.G. 48) Relying always on the one mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ, Catholics as pilgrims on earth share a communion of charity among themselves, and exchange spiritual goods with those in heaven, the saints, and those who have died and are being purified, the souls in Purgatory. The Church from earliest times, as the catacombs give witness, has remembered, prayed for and with, and honoured the dead.

There has been a constant veneration of the apostles, martyrs, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, all closely united to Christ. Catholics continue to ask for their intercessory prayers and the assistance of the angels. The Council teaches that the authentic cult of the saints lies "*in a more intense practice of our love, whereby for our*