

# *What Catholics Believe About the Church*

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## *Summary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraphs 748-870)*

### **What is the definition of the word “Church”?**

A convocation or assembly; the assembly of people for a religious purpose

*Ekklesia* (Latin, from the Greek Ekkalein, meaning “to call out”)—is the term used in the Old Testament

*Kryiake* (Greek term referring to “what belongs to the Lord”)—is used in the New Testament; this Greek word is what our English word “church” is derived from

### **Three Meanings of “Church”**

1. The liturgical assembly (people gathered to worship)
2. The local community (i.e. a parish)
3. The universal community of believers

*“The Church” is the People of God that gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body”*



CCC #752

### **The Word “Church” and Denominations:**

“As a result of schisms and divisions among Christians the word ‘church’ has come to be used frequently with a denominational reference, as in ‘the Methodist Church,’ ‘the Lutheran Church,’ ‘the Roman Catholic Church,’ ‘the Orthodox Churches,’ etc. Such denominational reference ..., while clearly unavoidable in the actual condition of the Christian world, may be said to have an anti-theological significance, in that it only serves to obscure the true value and significance of applying the word both to local communities and to the total community of believers in Christ.”

*The New Dictionary of Theology, pg 187*

## **The Church's Visible and Spiritual Reality**

### ***The Church is at the same time:***

A society structured with a hierarchy  
and roles

**AND**

The mystical Body of Christ

The visible society

**AND**

The spiritual community

The earthly Church

**AND**

The Church endowed with heavenly  
riches

### **Why Is This So?**

Because of the incarnation: Jesus Christ, the founder and sustainer of His Church, is both material and spiritual—both human and divine. Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity because He shares our humanity even as He exists in His divinity.

As the Sacred Constitution of the Church (Vatican II document) states: “the Church is essentially both human and divine” (SC 2)



## **The Church reveals the mystery of humanity's union with God**

“It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: ‘to unite all things in him’ (Ephesians 1:10).”

CCC #772

The Church's purpose: to express and communicate the communion of God with His people.

- *This happens most clearly in our celebration of the Sacraments, especially Eucharist.*
- *The Church anticipates her future glory as the Bride of Christ*
- *Mary is the perfect model of the holiness we all seek*

## **The Church is the Universal Sacrament of Salvation**

The Church, like Christ, is a sacrament: a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among people. “The Church both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies.” (CCC #774)

The Church's **first purpose** is to be the sacrament of inner union of men with God. The Church is the **visible plan of God's love for humanity**—she is Christ's instrument.

## Addressing objections to the Catholic understanding of the Church with Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers

***Objection 1: Jesus never really intended to found a Church, he was just working to reform Judaism.***

Response:	Scripture citations:
<i>Jesus clearly intended to found a Church that would fulfill the Covenant made between God and His Chosen People—extending this covenant to all people who believed in Him and joined the Church through Baptism.</i>	<i>Jesus selected Apostles and Disciples to learn from Him and to carry on his work from the earliest part of His mission (Mk 3:13-19, Mt 10:1-16, Lk 6:12-16, Lk 9:1-6)</i>  <i>Jesus identified Peter as the ‘rock’ upon which His Church would be founded (Mt 16:13-19, Jn 21:1-17)</i>  <i>Jesus commissioned the apostles to preach the Good News, to baptize all nations, to carry on His mission (Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:16-20, Lk 24:44-49, Jn 20:19-23)</i>

***Objection 2: Jesus never gave any details about a Church’s mission or structure—what we see now is the result of human organization/leadership.***

Response:	Scripture citations:
<i>Jesus gave clear instructions to his Apostles about the nature of their leadership and the purpose of the Church. Jesus gave authority to the Apostles with regard to dispensing grace (Sacraments), teaching (preaching) and governing.</i>	<i>The Church is founded on the apostles (Mt 19:27-29, Jn 20:19-23)</i>  <i>The Church’s mission is to declare the Good News of Jesus (Mk 6:7-13, Mt 28:18-20)</i>  <i>The Church’s leaders are to use Jesus as their model of the true Master, the Good Shepherd (Lk 9:46-48, Mk 9:33-37, Mk 10:35-45, Mt 20:24-28, Jn 13:1-15)</i>  <i>The Church’s structure and other matters would be directed by the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ return to the Father (Lk 24:44-49, Jn 14:25-26, Jn 15:26-27, Jn 17:6-8, 14-23)</i>

“The church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father and to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation so that they may lay the entire world at the feet of Christ.”

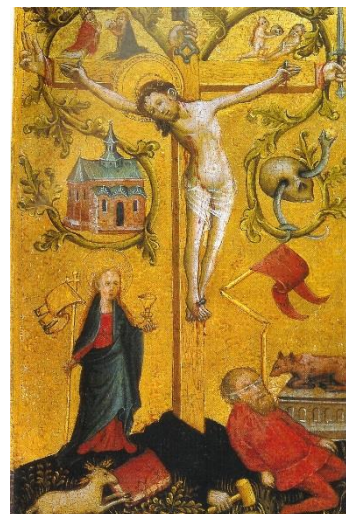
*Vatican II, Apostolicam actuositatem, 2*

***Objection 3: The Apostles didn't act as leaders of a new Church—they were not organized together but each acted separately because of the Spirit's direction.***

<b>Response:</b>	<b>Scripture citations:</b>
<i>The Apostles clearly led the early Church with authority concerning the true message of the Gospel, the practice of Sacraments and the establishment of leaders. The Apostles took up the authority to found Churches, establish leaders and judge those who violated the commandments or church practice.</i>	<p><i>The Apostles together elect a successor to Judas (Acts 1:15-26)</i></p> <p><i>After Pentecost, Peter preached the Good News and several thousands were baptized by him and the other apostles (Acts 2;14-41)</i></p> <p><i>The early Church is described in several summary statements as being organized under the direction of the Apostles (Acts 2:42-47, Acts 4:32-35)</i></p> <p><i>The Apostles appoint additional leaders in the Church (deacons), expressing their power and authority in Jesus through the laying on of hands (Acts 6:1-6)</i></p> <p><i>The Apostles act to found churches in other cities, always identifying the leadership of the new community (Acts 11:19-26)</i></p> <p><i>Paul and Barnabas are sent by the Apostles as preachers of the Word to other cities (Acts 13:1-3)</i></p> <p><i>The Apostles meet at a council to resolve a serious matter of doctrine about which Jesus left no clear direction—the Apostles make a decision together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:1-35)</i></p>

“The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Christ.”

CCC #766



***Objection 4: The Catholic Church is not the Church founded by Jesus; it developed in its basic structure and leadership after Christianity was legalized by Constantine in the 300's and developed after the Fall of Rome in medieval Europe.***

***What did the earliest Christian writers say about the Church?***

***St. Ignatius of Antioch (69-107)***

He was the first to use the term “Catholic Church” and he tells the Romans in his letter to them that the Church of Rome “presides in the chief place.” In his instructions to the Church at Smyrna in Asia, he writes, “You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ himself followed that of the Father; follow the presbytery (priests) as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God’s commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop... Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

***St. Irenaeus (writing in 189)***

“The blessed apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the church of Rome, they handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus.”

***St. Clement (writing in 221 to James)***

“Be it known to you, my Lord, Simon Peter, who, for the sake of the true faith, and the most sure foundation of his doctrine was set apart to be the foundation of the Church, and for this end by Jesus himself, with his truthful mouth, named Peter ... the first of the apostles.”

***St. Cyprian (writing in 251) in Carthage, North Africa***

Cyprian wrote a famous treatise on the unity of the Church. Included in that letter are the following passages: “The Church forms a unity, however far she spreads and multiplies ... just as the sun’s rays are many, yet the light is one, and a tree’s branches are many, yet the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one.” “You cannot have God for your Father if you have not the Church for your mother.” “God is one, and Christ is one, and His holy Church is one; one is the faith, and one the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unit of the body.”

***St. Jerome (380’s)***

“I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built.”

*“If you follow Jesus, you never feel alone because you are part of the Church, which is a great family in which you can grow in true friendship with so many brothers and sisters in the faith, scattered in every corner of the world.”*

*Pope Benedict XVI, 11/27/05*



## **Biblical Images of the Church**

From the Old Testament the images center on being the **People of God**

From the New Testament the images center on the **Body of Christ**

- **The sheepfold, the flock**—“God himself foretold that he would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, even though governed by human shepherds, and unfailingly nourished and led by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and Prince of Shepherds, who gave his life for his sheep.” (CCC #754)
- **The cultivated field, the tillage of God**—“On that land the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again. That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator.” (CCC #755)
- **The building of God**—“The Lord compared himself to a stone which the builders rejected, but which was made the corner stone. On this foundation, the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity.” (CCC #756)
- **The family of God**—“The Father determined to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ. This family of God is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father’s plan.” (CCC #759)



## **Key Images of the Church from Vatican II**

### **The People of God**

*We belong to God, we are united because we all are called by God. We become a member not by physical birth, but by being born anew in Baptism. Our law is the commandments of God. Our mission is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world—to take on Jesus’ threefold mission as priest, prophet and king. Our destiny is the Kingdom of God. (CCC #781-786)*

### **The Body of Christ**

*We are in an intimate communion with Jesus Christ—he is the head of his mystical Body, the Church. We are animated by the Holy Spirit He sent to us. The image of the bridegroom and bride is used to express the unity of Christ and His Church—the Church and each of the faithful members of his Body is as a bride betrothed to Christ the Lord. (CCC #787-796)*

### **Temple of the Holy Spirit**

*“What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. ... The Holy Spirit makes the Church the temple of the living God.” (CCC #797-801)*

## **Four Marks of the Church**

*In the Nicene Creed, we confess that “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”*

*These are called the four marks of the Church.*

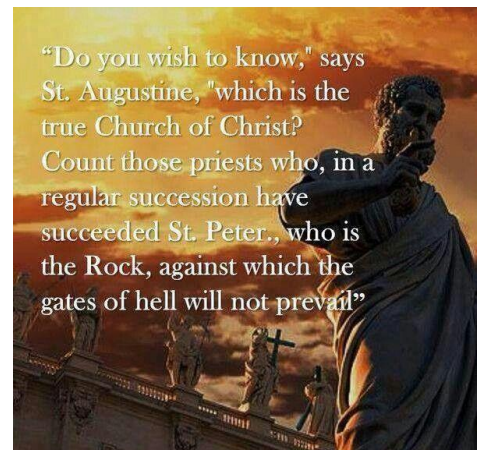
### **1. One**

The Church is ONE for 3 reasons: because of her **source** (God), because of her **founder** (Jesus Christ), and because of her “**soul**” (the Holy Spirit)

Diversity and Unity—our diversity comes from the variety of God’s gifts and the diversity of the people who receive them. The unity of the People of God is not harmed by this diversity. Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity—we must make the effort to maintain unity.

What are the bonds of unity? Above all, **charity**. The unity of the pilgrim Church is assured by visible bonds of communion:

- ***Profession of one faith*** received from the Apostles
- ***Common celebration of divine worship, especially of the Sacraments***
- ***Apostolic succession*** through the Sacrament of Holy Orders



### ***What about unity in this time of separation between Christian communities?***

*“In this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts... But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion of the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame.”*

*“However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers.”*

*“Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church... Christ’s Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church.” (CCC #817-822)*

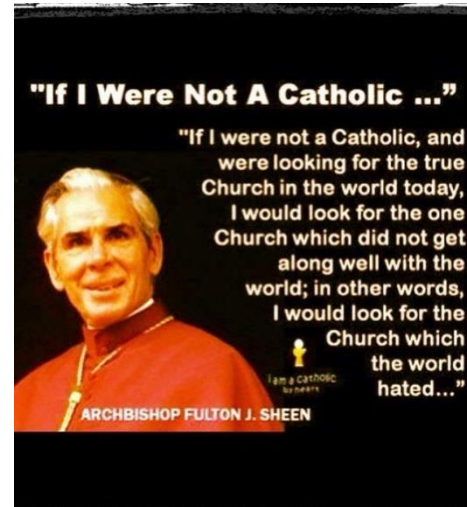
## 2. Holy

### Why do we call the church 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.” (CCC #823)*

### In what way is the church in need of purification?

*“The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners. In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time.” (CCC #827)*



## 3. Catholic

### The Church is ‘catholic’ (universal) in a double sense:

1. because **Jesus Christ is fully present in her**—she has received 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
2. because **she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race**. All are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God’s will may be fulfilled. (CCC #830-831)

### Who belongs to the Catholic Church? (CCC #836-845)

1. **The Catholic faithful**—those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who—by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion—are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops.

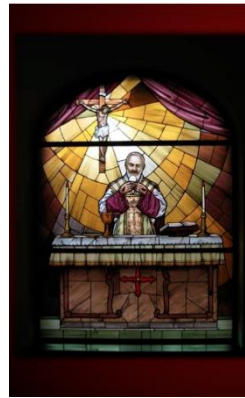


2. **Others who believe in Christ**—*The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. Those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.*

3. **All humankind**—*Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. ... The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions (such as Jews, Muslims, other non-Christian religions) that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. ...*

**“Outside the Church there is no salvation”—what does this mean?**

*“All salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body. Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church*



*“Always stay close to the Catholic Church, because it alone can give you true peace, because it alone possesses Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, who is the true Prince of Peace.”*

*– St. Padre Pio*

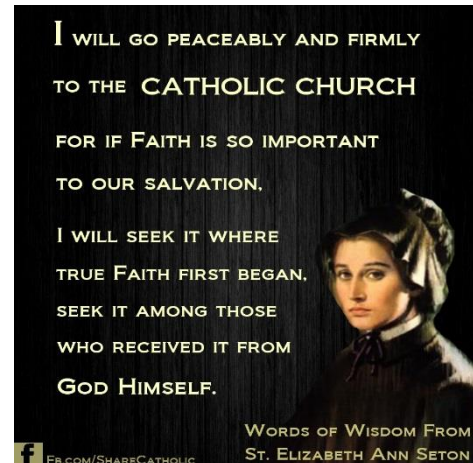
*which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse to enter it or to remain in it.” (CCC #846)*

*“This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who, nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.” (CCC #847)*

#### 4. Apostolic

The Church is founded on the apostles in three ways (CCC #857):

1. built on the *foundation* of the Apostles
2. the Church keeps and hands on the *teachings of the Apostles*, the deposit of faith
3. she continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the apostles through their *successors*, united under the successor of Peter, the pope



The word “Apostle” means witness—one sent out to testify to a truth

The whole church is apostolic—in that she remains in communion of faith and life with her origin, and that she is sent out into the whole world. (CCC #863)

The mission of every member of the Church is to engage in the “**apostolate**”—which means to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth. As lay people (non-ordained members of the Church), the task of Catholics in the world is to bring the light of Christ into the situations, relationships and events of our daily lives. We are called to be salt and light in our homes, our places of work, our neighborhoods and our countries. (CCC #864)

