

LESSON 12

ONE HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

BACKGROUND READING



When we recite the Apostles' Creed, we say that we "believe in the holy catholic Church." This means that we believe that Jesus established one true Church for all of humanity. It is not to imply that other faiths (especially other Christian faiths) do not contain elements of truth. But it is to say that, according to the Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism: "It is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained."

We know by the Church's four marks (traits or characteristics) – the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic – that the Catholic Church is the Church that Jesus Christ founded. Jesus gives these traits to the Church through the Holy Spirit.

The Church Is Holy

The Church is holy because her founder, Jesus Christ, is holy and because the Church exists to bring all people to salvation in Jesus Christ through the Sacraments. This mark of the Church does not mean that the imperfect human beings who make up the Church are all living holy lives. Pope Paul VI explained that the Church is holy, "though having sinners in

her midst, because she herself has no other life but the life of grace. If they live her life, her members are sanctified; if they move away from her life, they fall into sins and disorders." The Church is also holy because her mission – to bring all of humanity to salvation in Christ through the Sacraments – is a holy one.

The Church Is Catholic

The word *catholic* here means *universal*, in the sense of being whole and complete. Most importantly, the Church is whole and complete because Christ is always with it. St. Ignatius of Antioch said, "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." First, the Church has been given the fullness of the truth and is the only means of salvation. Second, the Church is whole and complete because Jesus established His Church for the entire human race. Jesus said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

The Church Is Apostolic

That the Church is *apostolic* means that the Church was founded by Jesus Christ on the Apostles, and He continues to govern it

today through their successors, the bishops. Jesus made the Apostles the first bishops at the Last Supper, giving them a share of His sacred power to celebrate Mass and minister the Sacraments for all Christians. The Apostles then passed on these sacred powers and traditions to proven men through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Those men in turn passed them on, and this process continued in an unbroken line to our time. This is why we can say that today's Catholic bishops are the successors of the Apostles. Your local bishop was consecrated by a bishop who was consecrated by a bishop who was consecrated by a bishop (and so on, over a hundred generations), who was consecrated by an Apostle, who was consecrated by Christ at the Last Supper.

The Church Is One

The Church is one because her source – the Trinity – is one. The Holy Spirit unifies all believers with each other in Christ. This mysterious unity is “the essence of the Church” (CCC 813). This mark also refers to the unity of the Church's belief, worship and liturgy, and government. The Catholic Church has always taught the same doctrines, and Catholics can be “at home” in the Family of God at Mass and in the Sacraments anywhere in the world. The official language of the Church, Latin, is a universal and unchanging language. Thirdly, the Catholic Church is one in its submission to the authority of Jesus Christ. Christ promised “one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). Christ is the invisible head of the Church, and the pope is Christ's representative on earth, the visible head. Bishops and priests are united to

the pope to form one government of Christ's Church.

The Communion of Saints

The oneness of the Church includes the way Christians are united by the Holy Spirit in the Mystical Body of Christ. And because our souls live forever, Christ's Body includes those believers who have died. This solidarity among all three states of the Church – Christians living on earth, the saints in Heaven, and the souls in purgatory – is one meaning of the term “Communion of the Saints.” “[S]ome of [the Lord's] disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating in full light, God Himself triune and one, exactly as He is” (*Lumen Gentium* 49).

More importantly, the Communion of Saints also describes how all the members of the Church are joined in and by the Sacraments – especially the Eucharist. The Eucharist both represents and brings about this communion.

Among the members of this body, the actions of one affect all. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.” We can pray for each other and bear each other's sufferings; we also harm this communion when we sin. All who are part of the Family of God in Heaven, in purgatory, and on earth share in all the good that exists, and especially that which Jesus Christ merited for us. We will learn more about Heaven, hell, and purgatory in the next lesson on life everlasting.

LESSON 13

AMEN! COME, LORD JESUS!

BACKGROUND READING



In this last lesson of the year, we move quickly through the final three articles of the Creed. In articles ten, eleven, and twelve we profess our belief in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

The Forgiveness of Sins

Only God can forgive sins. Christ cleanses us of Original Sin and all personal sins in Baptism. He gave the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, conferring on them His own power to forgive sins and instituting the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:22-23). Other Sacraments, including Anointing of the Sick and especially the Eucharist, forgive sins. We will study the Sacraments in depth in volume two of this program. For now, we focus on the truth that there is no sin so terrible that it is beyond God’s power or desire to forgive if we ask for His mercy with a contrite heart.

The Resurrection of the Body

When we say we believe in the resurrection of the body, we mean that not only will our souls live forever, but our physical bodies will, too. As we have learned, our bodily death is a consequence of Original Sin. Death is the

end of earthly life and allows us to participate in the death of Christ, so we can also share in His Resurrection. Jesus conquered death by His Death and Resurrection, and in His Resurrection is the hope of ours. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day (John 6:54). On the Last Day, Christ will raise the bodies of all people from the dead and reunite them with their souls.

Life Everlasting

When we state our belief in life everlasting, we mean that life lasts forever – either in Heaven or in hell. While we are alive on earth we can choose to accept or reject God’s grace. At our death, we will be judged and enter Heaven (through purification or directly), or hell. This is called the particular judgment. St. John of the Cross said of it, “In the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.”

Those who die in God’s grace will live forever in the glory of Heaven: the perfect life with the Blessed Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints. The glory of Heaven is called the beatific vision because we will be able to contemplate God as He is. “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). “They will see his face” (Revelation 22:4). Unlike earthly

satisfaction or pleasure, which is temporary, in Heaven we will be satisfied in our desire to be satisfied – Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness (CCC 1024).

Some will go to Heaven by way of purgatory. The *Catechism* explains, “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (CCC 1030). From the beginning of the Church, Christians have offered prayers and sacrifices for the souls of the departed, including most especially the holy Mass, that they may be purified and attain the beatific vision.

Those who have chosen to reject God’s merciful love will live forever in the state of eternal separation from Him. “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell’” (CCC 1033). God does not pick certain people ahead of time to send to hell. On the contrary, He wishes for all of humanity to turn away from sin and to live with Him forever in Heaven. A person goes to hell only when he makes a conscious choice to turn away from God and continues in that choice to the very end.

The secrets of every person’s heart, and the justice and mercy of God, will be made known to all at the Last Judgment. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will

be found out” (2 Peter 3:10). On this day, all who have died will rise again. People who had already been given a particular judgment will then go on bodily to their eternal destination: Heaven or hell. “When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works, and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace” (CCC 682). Christ’s Kingdom will come in all its fullness.

Amen

The word *amen* comes from the same Hebrew root as believe. It is loosely translated into English as “so be it.” When we conclude a prayer with the word amen, we are expressing our agreement with what has been said. Therefore, amen expresses at once God’s promise and our faith in His promise.

That promise and its fulfillment is the story we have been following all year. The “end” of that story will come when God ushers in a Kingdom completely in accord with God’s plan with Christ as its head. The awesome description of what this final Kingdom of God will be like is found in the book of Revelation, chapter 21.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their

God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.' The one who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' Then he said, 'Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true.' He said to me, 'They are accomplished. I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit

these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son'" (Revelation 21:1-5).

Once more, God will dwell with His people. In the fullness of God's Kingdom there will be no more sin. All sickness and mourning will pass away, and death will be overcome! God Himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. All His promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who takes up and completes our "amen."

The one who gives this testimony says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all (Revelation 22:20-21).