

The Church

"We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."

Introduction

Gospel Reflection

Matthew 16:21-27 (NABWRNT)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

¹³Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

¹⁸And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

¹⁹I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

²⁰Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

The Gospel of the Lord.

God's Divine Plan for Humankind

- God's desire is "to raise men to a participation of the divine life"¹
- Man is made in the "image and likeness of God" (Gn 1:26)
 - Image: the soul
 - Likeness: unity with God through obedience
- Jesus describes this desired unity in his highly-priestly prayer (John 17):
 - "And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, *so that they may be one just as we are one*" (Jn 17:11).
 - Trinity in essence is the model for the desired human community/unity
 - Self-donation/surrender creates "oneness"/ "wholeness"
 - Yet through self-donation, one creates identity
 - This is the antithesis of human thinking: we want to be in control; we do not want to be limited (or completely surrender self)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the

¹*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 2.

earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Is 55:9-9)

- “It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity. A prayer of St. Theresa of Jesus wonderfully expresses this trust:
 - ‘Let nothing trouble you / Let nothing frighten you
 - Everything passes / God never changes
 - Patience / Obtains all
 - Whoever has God / Wants for nothing
 - God alone is enough.’” (CCC ¶ 227)
- Sin (“disordered love”) creates disunity / disorder
 - Primordial temptation: “You will be just like God” (Gn 3:5)
 - “The Fall” caused separation
 - Sin creates separation from God; initiates a spiral of violence and disorder (e.g., murder of Abel)
 - “If any kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold” (Gn 4:15)
 - “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold” (Gn 4:24)
 - Question: How often did Jesus say one should forgive? (“seventy-seven times”, Mt. 18:22)

The Formation of the Church by Jesus was Intentional

Remedy for “The Fall” (an Instrument of Unity)

- Savior constitutes the Church as a remedy for “The Fall”
 - Pattern after “The Fall”: Violence and Domination
 - Nimrod was the first potentate (Gn 10:8); *unity of human race based on violence and domination*
 - Nimrod and his people (from the land of Shinar) exult themselves by building a tower (Babel); the Lord scatters the languages
 - Pentecost: *Unity of the human race based on love and the gift of the Holy Spirit*
 - Languages united (gift of tongues); opposed to the curse of Babel
 - “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5)
- To Understand the Church, need to consider promises and prophecies contained in the Hebrew Scriptures

Jewish Restoration Traditions

- Tradition of the *Visitation* of God; Return to Jerusalem
 - Jesus is asked: “Are you the one who will restore the Kingdom of David?”
 - Jesus laments over Jerusalem as not recognizing the time of its visitation (“because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”) Luke 19:44
- Tradition of the Enthronement in the Temple

- Messianic agent, “One like a Son of Man” (Daniel 7); creates issues with monotheism

Two Versions of the Messiah

- Suffering Servant messianic tradition (Isaiah)
- “Coming of the Kingdom” messianic tradition (Daniel and others)

Christianity resolves both by having the first and second coming

Promise to David: “I will establish a house for you” (2 Samuel 7)

- “The Lord also reveals to you that he will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. It is he who will build a house for my name. And I will make his royal throne firm forever.” (2 Sm 7:11-13)
- Two meanings of “house” (Temple and Kingship)/Jesus is both:
 - The Temple: Jesus is the Temple, the “House” (House David wanted to build for Yahweh)
 - Temple signifies reconciliation with God
 - Sacrificial cult/atonement
 - Reason why the cleansing of the Temple is theological significant (first event in John; immediately after Entrance into Jerusalem in the Synoptics)
 - Literal translation: “I will resurrect your seed” (the “house” Yahweh will build for David; confirmed with Resurrection)
 - Author of Zechariah did not believe Solomon had fulfilled this prophecy – See Zechariah 6:12-13.
- Messianic prophecy
 - Heir to David; Son of David
 - Temple-builder

Significance of Peter as “Rock”

- “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18)
 - Jewish belief: the Temple Mount was the rock that covered the mouth of the cave leading to the underworld (Sheol)
 - Rock shuts the gates of the underworld
 - Peter’s name translated: Kephaz (Aramaic); Petros (Greek) = Rock
 - Only reference in Gospels to “church”
 - People at the time of Jesus and Apostles would have understood the symbolism of the name
- References to the Temple in the Gospels are generally references to the Church
- There are four nodes associated with the Church: Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity

Summary

- Expectation of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures is to build the Temple
- Jesus understands himself as fulfilling the expectation

- Jesus' Temple building material is transformed to his Church – not an edifice

Catholicity and Apostolicity of the Church

Overview

- God's desire is "to raise men to a participation of the divine life"²
- The union between God and humankind is through Christ
- The work of the Church—founded by Christ—is to help all to participate in the divine life by attaining a "fuller unity in Christ"³ (an Instrument of Unity)
 - The "Mission" of the Church – to spread the Gospel

The Church is a Community of Spiritual Discipline

- All are called; not all join
- Church is not Puritan or rigorist (historical struggles, e.g., Novationism, Donatism, etc.)
- Church is composed of repentant sinners; Church is a "hospital," a healing ministry for sinners, calling its members to repentance
- Church is a community of repentant sinners

The Church is an "Ordered" Community

- Hierarchical Order (crystallized during first two centuries; universal by late second century)
 - Apostles
 - Bishops
 - Elders (presbyterate)
 - Deacons
- Role of the Apostles – govern, teach, make decisions about living
 - Mission to the Gentiles (sending Paul and Barnabas, Acts 12:25)
 - Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)
 - The Church succeeds to this mission: people are sent to teach, preach, and administer the sacraments
- Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107 CE)
 - Wrote letters on his way to martyrdom in Rome
 - Presupposes all churches have a common structure
 - Bishops like the Father
 - Priests like Christ, obedient to the Father
 - Presbyters compared to Apostles
 - Deacons compared to Christ as servant
 - Unity of the local church guaranteed by the bishop
 - Governs local church
 - Ensures validity of sacraments
 - "Where the bishop is, there let the people be, even where Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (Ignatius of Antioch)

²*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 2.

³*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 1.

Summary

- Hierarchical order (three-fold: bishop, priest, and deacon) appears early
- Notion of Church as “catholic” in two senses
 - Whole or universal in time and space
 - Pilgrim Church on earth
 - The Church in Glory / heavenly Jerusalem / heavenly city
 - Whole or complete in its proclamation (orthodox teaching)
- Notion of Church as “apostolic”
 - Apostolic Succession: Christ sends the apostles (“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations”, Mt 28:19); apostles commission bishops
 - Apostolic mission of the Church continues (all are called to unity with God in Christ)
 - Unity of the Church
 - Communion among members
 - Ordered – relationship of all to Christ as head
 - Pope bears the place of Christ in the visible order of the Church

Church as an Instrument of Unity (Communion or the “One”)**A. All Are Called to Unity in the One Church**Analogy of the Church as like a Sacrament

- “The Church is in Christ *like a sacrament* or as a sign and instrument...”
(*Lumen Gentium*)
 - Sign
 - Sign of intimacy with God
 - Sign of unity of the human race

Comparable to the Golden Rule: Love of God and Love of Neighbor

- Instrument
 - Cause of grace
 - Causes grace it *signifies* (intimacy with God / unity of human race)
- Church is a sacrament of the eschatological reign of God
 - Inner reality; inner communion of life
 - Sign requires an external form (just like Baptism or any other sacrament)
- Holy Spirit operates in the Church to create a fuller understanding of mission

Eucharist Represents and Causes Redemption and Unity

- Sacrifice of redemption: cause
 - Replaces Temple sacrifice
 - Sign of the new covenant
- Sacrament of Unity

Scriptural Analogies of the Church

- “Body of Christ”
 - “Building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12)

- We grow into Christ; joined together
- One new man in Christ (image of unity)
- Create a single new man
- Breaking down barriers to unity: “For he is our peace, he who made both one (Gentiles and Jews) and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh” (Eph 2:14)
- Christ includes all things in himself
- “Bride of Christ” (particularly in revelation)
 - Church is heavenly Jerusalem
 - Picks up theme of the prophets: “As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you” (Is 62:5)
 - Marital image = unity

Patristic Analogies of the Church

- Mother Church / Church as Our Mother
 - Symbolism of Church and Mary become commingled
 - Mary as the “new Eve”
 - Mary and Eve:
 - Like Eve, the Church is the Mother of the living
 - Like Mary, the Church is the Mother of all reborn in Christ
 - Church as spotless, virgin (St. Ambrose of Milan)
- St. Augustine: “the earthly city on pilgrimage to the heavenly city
- St. Thomas Aquinas: “the present Church as a sign of the Church in glory”
- St. Irenaeus: “Love of God builds Jerusalem; love of self builds Babylon. We determine which love and to which city we belong.”
 - Parable of the Tares (Wheat and Weeds): End of time, “membership” will be sorted out

Analogy of the Incarnation

- The Logos – a complex reality (hypostatic union)
 - Divine (free from suffering)
 - Human (subject to suffering)
- The Church – a complex reality (analogous to the Incarnation)
 - Human (visible assembly; order)
 - Divine (Holy Spirit within)
- Cannot separate the visible from the invisible
 - Structure of the community
 - Divine elements which form the inner life
- As the divinity of Christ is to his humanity, so the Holy Spirit is to the structure of the Church
 - In both cases, a divine person uses human nature as his instrument
 - In both vases, a divine person can be distinguished, but not separated from humanity
 - Humanity
 - In Christ, humanity of the divine person
 - In the Church, Holy Spirit brings into existence the social order of the Church

- Union
 - In Christ, the union is intra-personal (within one person)
 - In the Church, the union is inter-personal (we are instruments of the Holy Spirit)
- Analogy by Extension: The Church is the incarnation of the Holy Spirit
 - Powerful analogy, *but dangerous*
 - Overplays the importance of humanity
 - Overlooks the fact the Church is full of repentant sinners (i.e., divine perfection is absent)

B. There Exists a Real but Imperfect Communion

Overview

- God’s desire is “to raise men to a participation of the divine life”⁴
- The union between God and humankind is through Christ
- The work of the Church—founded by Christ—is to help all to participate in the divine life by attaining a “fuller unity in Christ”⁵ (an Instrument of Unity)
 - The “Mission” of the Church – to spread the Gospel and seek unity
 - Unity will not be perfected in the pilgrim Church

Relationship to Others

- There is *one* Church and this Church “*subsists in*” the Catholic Church
 - Note: It does not say the Church *is* the Catholic Church
 - Significant change from referring to others as “schismatics” (withdrawal from hierarchical communion) or “heretics” (departure from true profession of faith in its fullness)
 - Acknowledgment that some “elements of truth and sanctification” exist in other Churches
 - Mature approach to ecumenism from Vatican II
 - Christ founded one Church
 - The Church is unique / not a collection of churches
 - Unity is both a reality already present (pilgrim Church) and to be realized (Kingdom of Heaven)
 - Unity as an ordered whole (institutional integrity)
 - Unity is not perfect because the Church is composed of sinners (threatens separation)
 - Defining the Church’s relationship with others:
 - “For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect”⁶
 - “All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church”⁷

⁴*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 2.

⁵*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 1.

⁶*Unitatis Redintegratio* ¶ 3.

⁷*Unitatis Redintegratio* ¶ 3.

- People not fully incorporated in the Catholic Church are not precluded from spiritual benefit or salvation
- Definition of Church (Unity = Communion + Order)
 - Communion – members all connected to each other (See below)
 - Order
 - All the elements of sanctification and truth (see “Visible Bonds,” below)
 - Rightly ordered
 - In this world
 - As a company
 - Governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in his communion
- Defining relationships with others:
 - Full incorporated (full membership)
 - Visible Bonds (defined in *Lumen Gentium*) – elements of communion:
 - “Profession of faith”
 - “The Sacraments”
 - “Ecclesiastical government and communion”
 - Other requirements of members
 - Members must “persevere in charity”
 - Members are drawn by the grace of Christ and elect of their own free will to respond or not respond to this invitation to grace
 - Linked (a real, but imperfect communion)
 - “those who, being baptized, are honored with the name Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve the unity of communion with the successor of Peter”⁸
 - “Separated Churches” (e.g., Eastern Orthodox)
 - Profess the faith
 - Share in the sacramental life (i.e., “celebrate the Holy Eucharist,” the sacrament of unity)
 - “Ecclesial Communities”
 - Profess the faith
 - Do not share fully in the sacramental life
 - Related
 - “Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God (the Church)”⁹
 - Jews
 - More intimately united to Christians than other religions
 - Historical sense
 - Theological sense
 - God’s call is irrevocable (See Rom 11:25)
 - Muslims
 - Profess to hold the faith of Abraham
 - Adore the one and merciful God

⁸*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 15.

⁹*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 16.

- Acknowledge a final judgment day
- Sincere seekers – those on a quest to seek meaning
 - “Nor is God distant from those who in the shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things”¹⁰

Divine providence does not deny “the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life”¹¹

Church as an Instrument for Sanctification (Holiness)

Aspects of Holiness

- Holiness of consecration
 - Church is prepared and configured through Israel (a people set apart)
 - The Church is consecrated like a sacrament (sign and instrument, see above)
 - In the world, but not part of the world
- Holiness of foundation
 - Church is holy in its foundation
 - Christ’s Ministry and call of the apostles
 - Paschal Mystery
 - Pentecost
 - God’s covenant with Israel
 - Christ reconstitutes Israel around himself, establishing the new covenant and fulfilling the messianic prophecies related to the building of the Temple
- Holiness of destiny
 - “pure and spotless bride of Christ” (See “Scriptural Analogies of the Church,” above)
 - Not yet perfected in the pilgrim Church (See “Patristic Analogies of the Church,” above)
 - Destiny complete in the glorified saints
 - Mary is more perfected than others
 - Glorified saints, awaiting the resurrection of the body (not quite perfect yet)
- Holiness of constitution
 - Formal structure of the Church is objectively good (“ordered community”)
 - Hierarchical and charismatic gifts exist
 - Continuation of the apostolic ministry
 - Holiness of sacraments
 - Holiness of liturgy
 - Holiness of the consecrated life as a state within the Church
- Holiness of means
 - All elements of sanctification and truth exist within the Church

¹⁰*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 16.

¹¹*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 16.

- Elements are effectively holy, i.e., causes of grace
- Administration of the sacraments
- Proclamation of the Word
- Hierarchic and charismatic gifts
- Holiness of grace and virtue
 - The Church will never be lacking in actual righteous members
 - Holy Spirit will always be active
 - Connected to Catholic doctrine of infused (not imputed) justification
 - Interior change (Metanoia)
 - Holiness is a gift (“the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the holy Spirit and has been given to us”, Rom 5:5)

Universal Call to Holiness

- Everyone is called to holiness according to his/her concrete situation
 - “Be perfect, just as your heavenly father is perfect” (Mt 5:48)
 - Basic distinctions among the faithful (one vocation to holiness, lived out in different ways)
 - Laity
 - Clergy
 - Religious
- Consecrated life as a way to holiness
 - Not a “middle way” between clergy and laity
 - Some clergy and laity also live out their vocation to holiness in this way
 - Consecrated life contributes in a special way to the Mission of the Church
 - As a sign of holiness
 - As a context of ministry
- Vocation of the laity
 - People of God who are not ordained and not religious
 - Not a definition
 - Everyone in the Church has a vocation to share in the Church’s ministry
- Apostolate of the Laity
 - Possess an apostolate by virtue of Baptism
 - “Secular quality”; to sanctify the temporal order
 - Quality distinctive, but not exclusive to the laity
 - Temporal and spiritual orders are linked to the divine plan to renew all creation in Christ, initially here and fully at the consummation of ages”¹²

Role of the Church

- Sanctifying the World
 - The Church does not stand outside history
 - Mission is the sanctification of the world: calling all people to unity to God and unity to one another (love of God and Neighbor)
 - Church is present to the world through her members
 - Gospel must transform every aspect of life for every Christian¹³

¹²*Apostolicam Actuositatem* ¶ 7.

- “Indefectibly” holy
 - Indefectibly does not mean perfectly: means the Church can never lack the four properties: one, holy catholic, and apostolic¹⁴
 - Primarily a conviction of God’s purpose: permanence of election and call (See 2 Peter 1:10-11)
 - “Not based on any merely human considerations; it is a matter of our faith in the fidelity of God to his promises, and in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church”¹⁵
- “At once holy and sinful”
 - The Church is like a hospital for sinners
 - The Church “will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven when there will come the time of the restoration of all things”¹⁶
 - At that time, the *sacramentum* (sign and instrument) will give way to the full reality of unity
 - “Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth.”¹⁷
 - Membership of sinners
 - Some are in the Church “bodily,” but not in heart; some will be lost
 - Sinners, even those who will be lost, are still members of the Church
 - Sinfulness does not apply to *the identity of the Church*
 - In her members, including her pastors, the Church is sinful
 - “Official” acts of the Church can be sinful
 - Sinfulness does not pertain to the *identity of the Church*; rather to members of the Church and their actions
 - Church’s Mission: to be a redemptive community against the unholiness of sin
 - Unholiness is a betrayal of the Mission of the Church
- Sin and the Church as “sign”
 - The Church is like a sacrament – sign and instrument (see above)
 - Sin and division in the Church is counter-sign that detracts from the Church’s witness
 - A community of the repentant and the sorry – sinners in the Church – is an important part of the witness to conversion

Reign of Evil and the Solution

- Brokenness exists – caused by evil
- How do humans deal with evil?
 - Communication of an understanding of what God’s plan is (Faith)
 - Belief in divine providence (Hope)
 - Renewal of hearts, given disordered love is at the root of sin (Love)

¹³*Gadium et Spes* ¶ 43.

¹⁴Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1988), 220.

¹⁵Sullivan, 220.

¹⁶*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 48.

¹⁷*Unitatis Redintegratio* ¶ 6.

- Collaboration of faith, hope, and love
- One solution
 - One God
 - One human race
 - One evil
 - Ergo, one solution (the Church)
- Institutions: way to keep people and messages and track; collaboration requires an institution—in this case, the Church

Pastoral Responsibility of the Church and the Petrine Ministry (Apostolicity Revisited)

Overview

- Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20)
- The Twelve were distinct from the other disciples in the commissioning (above) and in Acts
 - Ministered and governed
 - Established Order
- Peter called about among the Twelve
 - “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18)

Apostolic Succession

- Mission entrusted by Christ to the Apostles
 - Three-fold ministry of Christ to be carried out by the Apostles
 - Priestly: Sacramental Life
 - Prophetic: Teaching and Preaching
 - Kingly: Ordering the Community; Unity
- Divine revelation ends with the death of the last Apostle
 - Church does not control God’s word
 - Summons: God has the initiative; Word received from Him, brings community into being
 - Response: Obedience of faith
- Apostles commission bishops to carry on the Mission
- Apostolic Succession refers to the unbroken chain of handing on the teachings of the Church since the time of the Apostles
 - Truth of the Gospel entrusted to the Church, to be proclaimed to all
- Bishops are communion with one another: a collective referred to as the College of Bishops
- Pope is the head of the College of Bishops

Participation in the Three-Fold Ministry of Christ

- Priestly Ministry
 - Sacraments are efficacious through the power of Christ
 - Not the minister of the sacrament
 - Beyond the Church, beyond the minister
 - Minister acts as the instrument of Christ (*persona Christi*)

- Prophetic Ministry
 - Teaching in the name of Christ: “Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” (Lk 10:16)
 - Teaching with authority
 - Calling the Church to the obedience of faith
 - Public v. private testimony
 - An authoritative public witness (Magisterium)
 - People look to the Church to understand the truth of the Gospel
 - Divine revelation mediated through the community
 - The alternative: private judgment (e.g., theologians)
 - Each personally interprets the truth of the Gospel
 - Each judges the testimony of the Church

If there is a public testimony, an instrument is required to make judgments. That instrument is the Magisterium – the College of Bishops exercising their teaching office

- Levels of authority
 - Article of faith (e.g., creeds, dogmas)
 - Articles to be held (influenced by revelation, e.g., evil of abortion)
 - Articles of wisdom (prudential judgments to be submitted to)
- Infallibility of the Church
 - The whole Body of the Faithful
 - The bishops collegially
 - In their ordinary teaching
 - In their extraordinary teaching (Ecumenical Councils)
 - The Pope personally
 - As head of the College of Bishops
 - With the authority from Christ, not the college
- What Infallibility is...and isn't
 - Not inspiration
 - Not illumination or special revelation (e.g., Gnosticism)
 - A charism of discernment
 - A “negative” assurance
 - The public witness of the Church is trustworthy
 - Because God’s promise is trustworthy
- Kingly Ministry
 - Christ governs the Church
 - By an authority which comes from beyond the community
 - Through the ministry of the Apostles
 - And their successors, the bishops
 - Bishops have proper authority (v. delegated authority) over their churches
 - Govern as vicars of Christ
 - Not as delegates of their respective communities
 - They are sacraments of Christ’s headship in their particular church

- Bishops are not the Pope's delegates

Petrine Ministry

- Ministry instituted by Christ
 - Peter called out by Christ, not the other Apostles
- Pope receives his authority from Christ, not the College of Bishops (He is not a delegate of the College of Bishops)
- A ministry of unity -- somewhat ironic in the context of Church history (e.g., the Primacy of the Pope separates the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches)
- Exercised by the Bishop of Rome
- Pope has personal responsibility for good order in the Church (Bishops have a collective responsibility)
- Every office instituted by Christ has the powers necessary to execute the ministry (e.g., priests given the power to confer the sacraments):
 - Universal jurisdiction (whole Church)
 - Immediate (not mediated)
 - Ordinary (not extraordinary)
 - Episcopal (true episcopal authority; a bishop but with a unique ministry of oversight)
- Personal reflection on the Petrine Ministry
 - In his high-priestly prayer, Christ prayed for his Apostles that “they might be one as we are one” (Jn 17:11)
 - Standard of unity, in this case, is the trinity: self-donation
 - Since the Church is the instrument of unity, to draw all into unity with God and one another, it makes sense the Church would be singularly united vs. fragmented or a collection of churches; the latter losing “order”
 - Hence, the Primacy of Peter makes sense given the standard of unity expressed by Christ in his prayer

The Communion of Saints

Overview

- Not in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed
- Included in the Apostles Creed (“I believe in the communion of saints...”)

Communio Sanctorum – Popular Interpretation

- “[R]eferring to persons (*sancti*)—the martyrs and confessors, living and dead, and all who constitute the body of Christ”¹⁸
- All people past, present, and to come
- Veneration of those who bear special witness:
 - Mary
 - Symbol of obedience

¹⁸Berard Marthaler, *The Creed: The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology* (Twenty-Third Publication, Mystic, CT, 1993), 329.

- “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was undone by the obedience of Mary” (St. Irenaeus)
- Christ as the “new Adam;” Mary as the “new Eve”
- Theotokos (“God-bearer”): Initial context is Christological, not Mariological
- Martyrs – those who bore witness by sharing in the suffering and death of Christ in an authentic way (“red martyrdom”)
 - Cult of Martyrs arose early in the Church
- Virgins – those who through a lifetime of denial and discipline, bear witness to the love of Christ (“white martyrdom”)
 - Desert Fathers and monasticism arose in the late second and early third century as the Roman persecutions began to diminish

Communio Sanctorum – A Second Interpretation

- “Holy things for holy people: *communio sanctorum* “can be rendered—perhaps more accurately—as ‘a sharing in, or partaking or, holy things.’”¹⁹
- “Holy things” (*sancta*) being a traditional term for the elements of the Eucharist (e.g., “Holy things to the Holy” – Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)
- “The Eucharistic meal, the consummate expression of communion, ‘union with’ Christ, in essence means sharing the ‘holy things’—the one bread and the common cup. The Eucharistic meal is the sacrament of unity par excellence in that it draws the participants—or better, ‘the celebrants’—into union with one another and with Christ”²⁰
- Unity in the sacramental life of the Church

¹⁹ Marthaler, 329.

²⁰Marthaler, 334, quoting St. Augustine.

Specific Questions and Answers

Does the Church teach that only Catholics can go to heaven (or merit salvation)?

No, salvation is not the exclusive domain of Catholics. With the publication of *Lumen Gentium*, the Church clarifies that other churches or communities are brothers and sisters, and are in communion with the Catholic Church, albeit an imperfect communion. The Church recognizes certain other denominations are united by virtue of their baptism and share the name Christian, participate in the sacramental life (fully or incompletely, depending on their belief in the Eucharist), have a common profession of faith, and accept the scriptures as the Word of God. Hence, the Church does recognize that despite an imperfect communion, matters common to the Church are included in other churches or ecclesial communities, and spiritual benefits are derived by members of those other churches or ecclesial communities.

Further, the Church also says Divine Providence does not deny “the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life” (LG ¶ 2). This refers to those who are “related to the People of God,” such as the Muslims and Jews who also profess to hold the faith of Abraham and who worship the one God. It also refers to those who are sincerely seeking the truth (i.e., the unknown God), for whom we believe God is “not far distant” from them.

It is worth noting, this is a very mature approach to ecumenism, stressing what others have in common with the Church versus differences.

Does it really matter whether I belong to the Catholic Church or another denomination?

We believe that God calls all people to participate in his divine plan, which includes unity to God through Christ. We believe the Church is the sign and instrument of such unity and, specifically, the Eucharist is the apex of such unity. We believe the one Church subsists in the Catholic Church and fully communion includes the profession of faith, the sacramental life, and the order ecclesial governance under the Successor of Peter. Accordingly, the Mission of the Catholic Church is to seek the unity of all to both God and Neighbor in as perfect way as possible in the pilgrim Church. However, there is also recognition that full unity may not be achieved until the glory of heaven.

Accordingly, we would ask each Christian to seek the truth (see Jn 8:32) and consider Christ’s call to the profession of faith, participation in the sacramental life—particularly the Eucharistic, which we believe is the apex of unity, and full communion within the structure of the Church. Through discernment and a rightly formed conscience, the individual will be guided by the Holy Spirit to make the right decision.

Is the Church really a divine institution?

The Church is a “complex reality,” containing both human and divine elements. The Church was instituted by Christ, when he entrusted his mission of proclaiming the gospel to his apostles. He provided them with the authority to teach, preach, and provide order to the Church. From this, there is a visible structure to the Church; the order and roles, for example, that one can see. There is also an invisible component: the work of Holy Spirit in guiding the pilgrim Church on its earthly sojourn. The key is that the visible (the structure of the community) cannot be separated from the invisible (the inner life of the Church).

One analogy that maybe helpful is the Incarnation of Christ. Christ was one person with two natures: a divine nature free from suffering united with a human nature capable of suffering. So it is with the Church: there is a visible assembly and structure united with the divine workings of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Church becomes an instrument to carryout God’s divine plan and a cause for grace.

If I am Catholic and in full communion with the Church, does that mean I will go to heaven?

No, it does not. Catholicity involves three visible bonds: a profession of faith, the full sacramental life, and governance of the ecclesial community by the Successor of Peter. This provides a person with full communion or membership. However, it does go further. There are the invisible components—those not seen. The person must persevere in charity and must be a member, not just in name, but in heart. The Church recognizes not all members will be saved. Again, the Church as an instrument to unite the human race to God through Christ, and to one another—an instrument, not a guarantee.

Disordered love, or sin, creates separation vs. unity. St. Irenaeus expresses this well: “Love of God builds Jerusalem; love of self builds Babylon. We determine which love and to which city we belong.”

The Church is full of sinners. How can it possibly be considered “holy”?

Let’s take this question in two parts. First, let us consider the “membership” of the Church. As Jesus taught, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do” (Mt 9:12). The Church is composed of repentant sinners, in essence, a hospital for sinners—a healing ministry calling its members to conversion. Members can include pastors within the Church, who can be sinful. After all, the members of the Church are human. The Church’s mission is to be a redemptive community; the unholiness of sin is a betrayal of the mission of the Church.

One more comment about the Church at this level: The Church is like a sacrament—a sign and instrument—of intimacy with God and unity with the human family. Sin is a counter-sign. However, having a community of the repentant and sorry within the Church is an important witness to conversion.

Now, let us look at the complex reality of the Church as institution. It is both human and divine. It is the fulfillment of the messianic promise of restoring the Temple and

we believe by faith in the fidelity of God’s promises. The Church was founded by Christ, by commissioning and entrusting his apostles with His message of proclaiming the gospel and making all nations disciples. We believe true believers always be united at the Eucharistic table. We believe the Holy Spirit will always be active in the Church. This holiness is not from human origins, but rather “the love of God poured into your hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). So, inherently, the Church itself can never lose its holiness because it is grounded in its commissioning and the gift received from sources transcending creation. Accordingly, all elements for sanctification and truth are contained within the Church. However, this does not mean members cannot sin, nor does it mean all members will ultimately be saved.

Am I responsible for the Mission of the Church? Isn’t that the prevue of clergy and religious?

Good question. All members of the Church have a universal call to holiness and all have a role in the mission of the Church. This is irrespective of the way a person chooses to live that calling, as laity, religious or clergy. The laity shares in the mission of the Church (to proclaim the gospel and to unite others with God through Christ and to one another). As laity, we possess an apostolate by virtue of our Baptism. It is secular in nature, to be sure; however, we have the opportunity to sanctify the temporal order—to bear witness to Christ in secular society. Both spiritual and temporal orders are linked to God’s divine plan to renew all creation in Christ. Accordingly, the laity too is called to action to promote the mission of the Church. After all, the laity comprises 98- to 99-percent of the Church.