

The Church  
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THE CHURCH AS A MYSTERY:

1. The Church is both human and divine. It is visible but endowed with invisible realities. It is made up of a community of believers in mass and structure. It is also animated by God itself. A supernatural reality. To loose sight – we would treat it like a club of people.
2. The Church is a mystery because its origin is in the Trinity who brought the Church into being. It is a mystery not to be solved. We won't fully grasp God until we are before Him. The Father called the Church into being, the Son established the Church into history, and the Holy Spirit filled the Church with power and wisdom at Pentecost.
3. The Church's mission is to be the Sacrament of Salvation.

MEANING TO THE WORD "CHURCH":

The word Church is a translation of two biblical words: the Hebrew "qahal", and the Greek "ekklesia". Both words mean "gathering of people or community". The meaning was first applied to the people of Israel whom God called into existence by God.

The Church has visible structure and is guided primarily by the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) and the bishops. Together the Pope and bishops are the successors of the holy Apostles.

The word Church also applies to specific geographical communities called dioceses. The word Church also applies to the specific buildings where the faithful gather for the Sacraments.

Finally, the word Church refers to individual families who are called domestic churches.

THE CHURCH IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE TRINITY:

How did the Church come to be?

From the beginning, the Church was part of God's plan for sharing his divine life with all people. The process was gradual beginning in the Old Testament. For example, God's covenant with Abraham and promise that Abraham would be the father of great people, the liberation of ancient Israel from slavery in Egypt and their establishment in the Promised Land, and their solidification as a nation through the kingship of David.

Later, in the New Testament, Jesus fulfills the Father's plan by establishing the Church in human history through his preaching of the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus establishes the visible structure of the Church with his selection of the Twelve Apostles, with Peter at the head.

The Holy Spirit reveals the reality of the Church at Pentecost, coming upon the Apostles and disciples with transforming fire and forming them into a visible community empowered to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. The link between the Holy Spirit and the Church is captured by the words of St. Athanasius: “Where the Church is, there is also God’s Spirit; where God’s Spirit is, there is the Church.” The Book of Acts of the Apostles demonstrates the presence of the Holy Spirit Who maintains the stability, durability, and continuity of the Church through favorable and unfavorable historical circumstances.

### THE CHURCH AS THE SACRAMENT OF SALVATION:

The visible Church is a public institution with a hierarchical government, laws, and customs. It is a timeless model established by Christ.

The Church is also an invisible spiritual reality with bonds of faith and love forged by the Holy Spirit.

This two-fold nature of the Church is traditionally described as the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a living body sustained by the hidden work of the Holy Spirit Who is the source of unity of all aspects of the Church.

[CCC #775](#) - The Church is like a Sacrament – “a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”

The Church gathers people “from every nation, race, people, and tongue” ([Rev 7:9](#))

### THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

This image of the Church scriptural and patristic roots was emphasized by the Second Vatican Council’s document *Lumen Gentium*.

God’s people include the popes, patriarchs, bishops, priests, deacons, laity and men and women religious. Each group has a special mission and responsibility to the Church.

### THE CHURCH IS A PRIESTLY PEOPLE:

All the baptized share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the “common priesthood of the faithful.”

The works, prayers, activities of family and married life, apostolic endeavors, use of leisure time, and even sufferings and setbacks in life can be made into spiritual offerings pleasing to God when united with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. In this manner, these acts can all become forms of divine worship.

Based on this “common priesthood” but distinct from it and ordered to its service is the ordained priesthood. This priesthood is conferred to men by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

[CCC #1592](#) – The ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful.

#### THE CHURCH AS A PROPHETIC PEOPLE:

Prophet is someone who is a witness to God and speaks the truth to others. They are not fortune tellers. They understand the logic of God's Grace.

We share in God's role as prophet. For example, Parents have a prophetic role with their children as does a sponsor in the RCIA program.

This also involves the Church's missionary and evangelization activities, the catechetical ministry, the teaching of theology, and the use of all forms of contemporary media.

We have a duty to share our faith to others including those who do not yet share our faith.

#### THE CHURCH AS A ROYAL PEOPLE:

Jesus came "not to be served but to serve and give life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). When we imitate Christ in this way, we share in His kingly mission and point to His Kingdom of love, justice, mercy, and salvation. Servant leadership is a responsibility of each member of the Church.

#### THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION:

CCC, Glossary – The Church as Communion is our loving fellowship and union with Jesus and other baptized Christians in the Church, the Body of Christ, which has its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist by which we are joined in divine love to the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are joined to the Church by our Baptism and participation the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist which opens our minds and hearts to the Trinity, the loving community of three Divine Persons in One God.

#### UPON THIS ROCK:

In the Gospel of [Matthew, Chapter 16](#), Jesus asks the twelve "Who do you say that I am?" Peter alone replies "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In turn, Jesus responds "Blessed are you Simon bar Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." Then, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church."

The name Peter means rock. Jesus promises to give Peter the "keys to the Kingdom of Heaven". Jesus promises that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. Peter is the first in line of supreme shepherds called the Popes.

## THE 4 MARKS OF THE CHURCH:

The True Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

[CCC, #811](#) – 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. These words are stated in the Nicene Creed. The 4 marks are inseparably linked with one another and are essential features of the Church and her mission on earth.

The Church is One: The mark of oneness reflects the unity of the Blessed Trinity. The Church professes one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism and forms one body under the leadership of the Holy Father and successor to St. Peter, the Pope.

The Church is Holy: The Church has her source in the Holy Trinity who is the source of her holiness. The Church is holy in Christ her Founder, in the saints, and in her means of salvation, the Sacraments. The members of the Church grow in holiness through their participation in the life of the Church through the Sacraments.

The Church is Catholic: The word Catholic means “universal”. The Church is led by the Holy Spirit to bring the Gospel of Christ to all peoples. The Church is universal in her presence in local communities called dioceses or eparchies in the case of the Eastern Churches. These specific geographical communities are referred to as “particular churches”. They exist throughout the world.

The Church is Catholic through her relationship with other baptized Christians who are not in perfect union with herself but who nonetheless share in the Christian faith through Baptism. The Catholic Church acknowledges a special relationship to the Jewish people who are our forefathers in faith.

The Church is Apostolic: The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles from whom she received the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides the Church to remain faithful to the teaching of the Apostles for all time. The successors to the Apostles are the Bishops.