

The Church

Number Two

What are some symbols of the Church as found in Scripture and Tradition?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us 5 symbols of the Church that help us to understand more clearly what it is and how it works.

- a. **The Sheepfold**- Christ is the sole “gateway” to the mystery of the Church. The Church is “**the flock** of which God Himself foretold that He would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, even though governed by human shepherds, are unfailingly nourished and led by Christ Himself.” Christ is the Good Shepherd of the sheep of God.
(John 10:1-10; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34: 11-31)

- b. **The Field**- “The Church is a cultivated field...on which 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.” The Church is “**a choice vineyard** (which) has been planted by the Heavenly Cultivator...the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches...”
(1 Corinthians 3:9; Romans 11:13-26; Matthew 21: 33-43)

- c. **The Temple**- “The Lord compared Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the corner stone. On this foundation, the Church is built by the apostles and from it the

Church receives solidity and unity.” The Church, as the Temple of God, is the place where the **family of God dwells, where the Spirit of God resides**. The Church is **the building of God of which Christians are living stones**.

(Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7)

- d. **The New and Heavenly Jerusalem**- In its perfected state, the Church is described as the “spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb.” It is the Church whom “Christ loved and for whom He delivered Himself up that he might sanctify her. It is she to whom He united to Himself, by an unbreakable alliance, and whom He constantly nourishes and cherishes.”

(Galatians 4:26; Revelation 12:17, 19:7, 21:2; Ephesians 5:25-26, 29)

How is the sacrificial death of Jesus related to the Church’s beginnings?

The Catechism of The Catholic Church explains that “The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving (on the Cross) for our salvation...The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus. For it was from the side of Christ...upon the Cross that there came forth the wondrous ‘sacrament’ of the whole Church.”

How is the Church like a sacrament?

A sacrament is defined by *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* as “an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us by the work of the Holy Spirit.” So, the Church is like a sacrament because it brings grace to the world through its sacraments and prayer and makes Christ present to all human beings. The Church is “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men.”

What parable which Jesus gave us describes the Church in the world today?

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus gives the Parable of The Weeds Among the Wheat. Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like a “man who sowed good seed in his field...” Jesus explains, however, that “an enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat and then went off...” This is Jesus’ way of explaining the coexistence of good and evil in the world which will exist until the end of time. This is why the Church exists today in an imperfect state while being called by God to perfection. The Catechism is clear that this complete perfection will not occur until the Last Judgment.

What is papal infallibility?

The Catechism defines it as follows “(the Pope), head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals...” The text goes on to state that “ the infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the...Magisterium, above all in an ecumenical council.”

How is Mary the Mother of The Church?

The Encyclopedia of Mary tells us that this title of Mary was “proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1964, at the close of the third session of the Second Vatican Council. The pontiff declared Mary as ‘Mother of The Church,’ meaning mother of the whole people of God.” The pope’s proclamation affirms the Scriptural basis of this title. This basis is found in **John 19:25-27**. Here, Jesus delivers Mary into the care of St. John as He lies dying on the Cross. He declares to Mary “Woman, behold your son” and then directs St. John “Behold your Mother.” The Church understands that at this moment, Mary became the Mother of the Church through God’s divine will.

What does it mean that Mary is the Church’s Mother?

It means that she cares for the Church with her maternal love, exercising constantly her intercession for it. As members of the Church, this means that Mary is always praying for us to grow in faith, hope and love, to grow in holiness and to be protected from all evil. It was because of Mary’s ‘yes’ to God’s will for her that she became the Mother of God. From this ‘yes’ later flowed the existence of the Church itself as Christ established it.

How do we respond to Mary as Mother of The Church?

The disciple of Christ who seeks to follow Mary’s example is attentive to the way that she prays and how she loves. As Mary constantly prayerfully intercedes for the Church, we should do the same. As Mary cares for the Church and wants it to be built up in holiness, so we should do all that we can to help the Church in the same way, both through prayer and action.

