

ECCLESIOLOGY



PART I: THE FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH

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THE CHURCH IS ONE

- **One Lord and One Church:** There is only one God (Deus. 6: 4), and that God is Lord of all (Deut. 10: 17). God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Son is Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit to become man and offer a perfect human nature as a sacrifice for our sins to deliver us from death and the devil. Jesus, the Son of God, is the only savior of all humanity. So that humanity might receive the fruits of the sacrifice of the Jesus upon the Cross and a share in the glory of the Resurrection, Jesus instituted seven Sacraments. These Sacraments are entrusted to the Church of Christ. God has founded only one Church, the Catholic Church, to be His instrument and sacrament of salvation for all humanity. (Vatican II, dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 1 and 7: *AAS* 57 (1965), 5 and 11-12)
- **The Church is One – Faith, Sacraments and Ecclesiastical Governance:** The Church, the People of God and Christian faithful, manifest the “oneness” of their fellowship in Christ by professing the same one faith, receiving the same Sacraments, and through unity with the shepherds of the Church who govern the Christian faithful. (See *CIC*, c. 205)
- **One body, One Family – *Ut Unum Sint*:** Before Jesus was crucified, while in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed his “High Priestly Prayer” where He prayed that all of His people would be one, just as He is one with the Father. (See John 17) This means that there should never be divisions amongst the Christian faithful and that we are called to be one family.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

- **The Church is indefectibly holy:** The Church suffers no defect, absence or loss. There is nothing lacking in the Church's holiness or its ability to save souls.
- **Christ sanctifies the Church:** Jesus sanctifies the Church because He has wed Himself to the Church and united His real body with the Church, His mystical body, and fills her with holiness and grace. Thus, everyone who enters the Church through Baptism is sanctified by Christ and is called to a life of holiness. (Vatican II, dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 39: *AAS* 57 (1965), 44) Christ, who acts through the Sacraments and by bestowing grace upon us in other ways, is constantly sanctifying the Church: the People of God and His mystical body.
- **The Church is filled by the Holy Spirit:** The holiness of our lives are manifested in the fruits and graces that the Holy Spirit has nourished in our life. Following the evangelical counsels: poverty, simplicity and obedience; manifesting the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit received at Confirmation, and living by the theological and cardinal virtues are all the fruits of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life.
- **The Angels & Saints:** The Angels and Saints are proof and models of holiness for us. Furthermore, their heavenly life manifests the holiness of the Church. The credibility of the Church's ability to bring us to eternal life is manifest each time a holy member of the Church becomes a saint in heaven. (*CCC*, 828) The holiest member of the Church is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is absolutely sinless, and is the model and type of the Church, thus witnessing to the absolute holiness and incorruptibility of the Church. (*CCC*, 829)

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

- **Catholic = Universal:** The Church is the same Church everywhere in the world as the Church manifests communion universally. Each particular church, such as a diocese, is truly Catholic because it maintains communion with the head and mother Church of all, the Church in Rome. “For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord. (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 3, 2: PG 7/1, 849)”
- **Fullness of the Means of Salvation:** Christ Jesus is present in the Church. “Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church. (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn.* 8, 2: Apostolic Fathers, II/2, 311)” The Church, therefore, receives the fullness of the means for salvation from Jesus.
- **The Fullness of the Truth and Faith:** The Church is also “the pillar and bulwark of truth. (I Tim. 3: 15)” It is this truth and faith that the Church proclaims to the whole world.

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

- **Apostolic Origins:** The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles. The Sacraments were first celebrated by the Apostles, after their institution by Jesus. The faith was first taught by the Apostles. The structure given the Church was that which the Apostles developed based on the teachings of Jesus.
- **Apostolic Succession:** The ministries of teaching, governing and sanctifying belong to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is through the high priest or bishops, that these three ministries persevere in the life of the Church today and are in communion with what the Apostles did and taught because the first bishops were those ordained by the Apostles and all bishops, to this day, are successors of the Apostles. We can show how every bishop ordained today goes all the way back, in a line of succession, to the Apostles themselves. It is for this reason that bishops receive a special grace by their ordination to be “builders of the Church” and “the charism of truth” so that the faith, sacraments and shepherding that they engage in are in communion and an organic development from the foundation given by the Apostles themselves.
- **Apostolic Teachings:** The “Apostolic Deposit of Faith” are those doctrinal teachings given by the Apostles themselves. At the time of the death of the last Apostle, John, around 110 A.D. all Divine Revelation was accomplished and the Sacred Scriptures were complete. To this day, no new teaching can be proposed by any authority in the Church, neither the pope nor an ecumenical council, that is not found in the Apostolic deposit of faith.
- **Apostolic Structure:** The hierarchical structure of the Church was bestowed upon it by the Apostles themselves.