

# St. Mark Study Guide

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## March 8, 2017: The unity of the Church, Ecumenism and Persecution



There are four marks of the church professed in the Nicene Creed. The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Today, we discuss the oneness of the church and its essential unity. The following excerpt is from the Bishops of the United States on the relationship between Roman Catholics and other Christians.

### **THE CHURCH IS ONE**

“The mark of oneness reflects the unity of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, unites all the members of the Church as the one People of God. The Church professes one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism and forms one body (cf. CCC, no. 866) under the leadership of the Holy Father, successor to Peter the Apostle. Within the Church there is a diversity of races, nations, cultures, languages, and traditions, which are held together in one communion by the gift of love from the Holy Spirit. The unity that Christ bestowed on his Church is something she can never lose (cf.

Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism [Unitatis Redintegratio; UR], no. 4; CCC, nos. 813, 815).

## **DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH**

Tragically, members of the Church have offended against her unity, and throughout the centuries, there have developed divisions among Christians. Already in the fifth century, doctrinal disagreements led to the separation of some Christians in the eastern region of the Roman Empire from the main body of the Church. More damaging was the rupture between Rome and Constantinople in AD 1054. And in the sixteenth century Western Europe experienced the divisions that followed the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Church has always been committed to the restoration of unity among all Christians. This commitment was intensified by the Second Vatican Council and led the Church to participate in what is called the ecumenical movement. The word ecumenical means “worldwide” and, in a Catholic understanding, describes efforts “for the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ” (UR, no. 24; CCC, no. 822).

## **THE WORK OF VISIBLE COMMUNION**

This is to be a visible communion. “Full unity will come about when all share in the means of salvation entrusted by Christ to his Church” (Pope John Paul II, On Commitment to Ecumenism [Ut Unum Sint; UUS], no. 86). “Communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is—in God’s plan—an essential requisite of full and visible communion” (UUS, no. 97). Ecumenism includes efforts to pray together, joint study of the Scripture and of one another’s traditions, common action for social justice, and dialogue in which the leaders and theologians of the different churches and communities discuss in depth their doctrine and “to work for unity in truth” (UUS, nos. 18, 29). In dialogue the obligation to respect the truth is absolute. ... At the same time, the Catholic Church recognizes that the Holy Spirit uses other churches and ecclesial communities “as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church” (CCC, no. 819; LG, no. 8). *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (2012-04-02). United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (Kindle Locations 2042-2052). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Kindle Edition.*

Pope Francis has pointed out that there is a unity in the martyrdom of Christians. The oppressor doesn’t ask what kind of Christian you are when they kill you.

## UNDER CAESAR'S SWORD DISCUSSION

- 1) We saw a number of different examples of persecution in the film, *Under Caesar's Sword*. Some persecution came from non-state organizations, like the violence by ISIS which forced refugees to flee to Turkey and surrounding areas. Some hostility came in less formalized ways, like the Kandhamal riots in India which the woman said made her and the other Christians flee into the forest. Some persecution came from the government, as with the legal restrictions in Turkey and India. We can describe persecution based on *who is promoting it* and *how severe it is*.
  - a. **Discuss: What did you learn about persecution? Did anything surprise you?**
- 2) We also saw a number of different kinds of responses by Christians. The Christian refugees in Iraq and Syria had to migrate to escape with their lives. The small church in Turkey (a) put up security equipment and (b) continued building connections with their community, even under threat. The Christians in India pursued legal and judicial measures to defend human rights. We can think of responses under the categories of *survival, construction, and confrontation*.
  - a. **Discuss: Why do you think Christians took these measures? Can you relate to them?**
  - b. **Discuss: Why do you think levels of violence and repression change? What do you make of the fact that neither persecution nor safety remains constant?**
- 3) What else in the film did you find surprising, thought-provoking, sad, or hopeful?
  - a. **Discuss: What memorable stories or reflections will you take with you after today? Why?**
  - b. **Discuss: Is there some way you could express solidarity with persecuted Christians? Does their example have any lessons for you as you try to bear witness to the Gospel and Christian teaching with clarity and courage? Please feel free to look at the handout for ideas.**