

THE CHURCH

Introduction

- What do we think of when we hear the word 'church'?
- What about 'the Church' or 'the Catholic Church'?
- What about other Churches and Ecclesial Communities? What makes us Catholic and not Protestant?
- Do you think of the Pope, St Peter's Basilica, the Diocese, the Cathedral, your parish church, the place where you attend Mass?
- Is 'Church' a place you go to on Sunday, but which doesn't mean anything for the rest of the week?
- What role do we play in the Church?

The Meaning of the Word 'Church'

- The word 'church' comes from a Greek word, *kyriake*, meaning 'of the Lord'
- The Latin word *ecclesia* comes from a Greek word meaning 'to call out', 'to summon', or 'to gather together'
- The Greek word was used before the time of Jesus to refer to the assembly of the Jewish people – it translates the Hebrew *qahal*, which refers to the people, especially when they gather in assembly for a given purpose, especially celebrating their Covenant with God in worship
- The Jews were eventually monotheists, believers in the one God, and they believed they had been called by that God to be his Chosen People (cf. Exodus 19:4-6)
- A recurring theme in the Church is: 'I will be your God... You shall be my people.'

Jesus and the Church

- God became human so that we may become divine. He proclaimed the Good News, calling people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins
- He established the New Covenant – Last Supper, Death & Resurrection
- So, why did the early Christians use the word 'Church'?

- First, Jesus established a community of believers around himself, not based on blood but on discipleship. There is an echo of the *qahal* in that he chose twelve disciples; the Church is a chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people set apart (1 Pet 2:9)
- This community will take on the character of the Chosen People is symbolised in the use of the word 'Church' in Mt 16:18
- The development of the Church in Paul's mission and letters:
 - The universal Church – the whole community of believers (which became the Catholic Church)
 - The particular Church – a local community (the origins of dioceses and, later, parishes)

New Testament Visions of the Church

- People of God: called to share in Christ's prophetic (proclamation of the Word), priestly (worship of God) and kingly (service of brothers and sisters) mission; the Church is the herald and sign of the glory of heaven
- Body of Christ: underlying unity of the Church is revealed in the diversity of orders, charisms, role; it also hints at a necessary ordering of the community lest chaos ensue – the origins of the hierarchy; the Church is no ordinary organisation – we are members, Christ is Head
- Temple of the Holy Spirit: individuals and community; consecrated in Baptism and Confirmation; Church fulfils the role of the Temple in Old Testament; 1 Cor 3:10,16 – the Christian community is imbued with the Holy Spirit and reveals and proclaims his glory and his presence in the midst of Creation

The Marks of the Church

- One: the importance of Acts 2:42; unity is an article of faith but it seems strangely absent in practice. We believe in one Church because there is one Christ, human and divine; this Church subsists in the Catholic Church; ecclesiology of communion as being fundamental to interpreting Vatican II; unity of faith, sacraments and governance – expressed in Holy Communion at Mass which has both a vertical and horizontal dynamic
- Holy: the holiness of God fills the Church, not by the merits of individual Christians but as grace; the Church's holiness is 'real yet imperfect' and

‘perfect holiness is yet to be acquired’ (LG 5); Church has all means necessary for salvation – call to holiness is for everyone

- Catholic: universal in time and space, eternity; often used to contrast the Catholic Church with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities – ecumenism; the Church is Catholic because she is rooted in Christ, has a universal mission, international, trans-generational, going beyond particular cultures and histories; catholicity is lived in particular Churches, in which and out of which the Catholic Church lives; Pentecost
- Apostolic: we’re all called and sent out to bear witness to Christ in our daily lives; apostolic succession – rooted in Christ; passing on the Deposit of Faith which we have received – Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium

Mary and the Saints

- The saints are the Church triumphant – our fellow Christians who have shared in Christ’s Death and now share his Resurrection
- We await a bodily resurrection – hence the importance of Mary’s Assumption; at the end of her life, having been preserved from sin (the Immaculate Conception) she was assumed into Heaven:
- Mary is a woman of faith, hope and love, exemplifying for us the three theological virtues

Our Role as the Church

- Christ the Prophet
- Christ the Priest
- Christ the King
- In all this we are disciples of Christ, welcoming people to share what we share

Holy Communion

- Mass as beginning and end, not be-all-and-end-all
- Gather as individuals and a community – as Catholics, we’re both/and people
- We are most authentically the Church gathered to celebrate Mass

- During Mass we follow Christ's invitation to 'Come and see' (Opening Rites) and celebrate and live his prophetic (Liturgy of the Word), priestly (Liturgy of the Eucharist) and kingly mission (Concluding Rites – 'Go forth...')

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12 March 2012