

SEGMENT FOUR

THEME: THE CHURCH – THE PEOPLE OF GOD, THE BODY OF CHRIST, and TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” Psalm 100: 3

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” 1 Peter 2:9

Psalm 100; Psalm 117:22; Acts 2: 43 - 47

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

We are essentially social beings. The human response to God’s revelation in faith draws us into a community of believers. For God invites each of us into a personal relationship of faith, hope and love in the context of a community of believers. God chose the people of Israel to be his own and strengthened them on their journey to salvation.

Jesus inaugurated the Church by preaching the Good News of salvation in Him. He gathered apostles and disciples around Him who learned a new way of life. The apostles with Peter as their head were sent forth to preach, teach and serve the community of believers in the name of Jesus. The Church is born primarily from Jesus’ total self-giving for our salvation on the cross. We believe that it is in and through the Church that the saving work of Christ continues in the here and now, and in every time and place.

We receive the new life of faith from the Church, our “mother and teacher in faith.” The Catholic Church is a universal (*catholic*) institution that is primarily a community of love, grounded in faith in Jesus Christ and inspired by the hope of eternal life. It is a visible institution and a spiritual community. Three biblical images of the Church: the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

- ❖ We are created as social beings. We need one another to understand and grow in our relationship with God. In the Bible God forms a community of believers who become the visible image of divine love. To accept the gift of faith is to be united to God, the giver of all gifts and to all those who accept that same gift. (CCC, 738)
- ❖ In the Old Testament God chose the Israelites to be His people. (CCC, 761 – 762, 778)
- ❖ In the New Testament, Jesus calls his disciples to form a community of faith as the people of the New Covenant. Jesus inaugurates the Church through his preaching and teaching and in His total self-giving on the cross (CCC, 763 – 766)
- ❖ Today this community of faith, hope and love is continued in the Catholic Church. The Church is a mystery that is both visible and spiritual, human and divine, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ (CCC, 771, 779)
- ❖ The Church is the “sacrament of salvation,” which is to say that the Church is the “sign and instrument” of our union with God and of our union with one another. (CCC, 774). The Church is the “visible plan of God’s love for humanity” (CCC 775 – 776)
- ❖ We are members of the People of God by faith and baptism. In our common faith in Jesus Christ we form “one family and one People of God – a priestly, prophetic and royal people (CCC 781 – 786)
- ❖ The Church is the Body of Christ. In the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist “Jesus Christ, once dead and now risen, establishes the community of believers as his own Body.” In this one Body of Christ, there is a diversity of members, functions and gifts. Christ is the head of His Body, the Church (787 – 796)
- ❖ The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit is the source of the Church’s life, of her unity in diversity, and of the riches of gifts and graces given to the faithful through the Church.
- ❖ By daily imitating the example of Jesus the faithful are called to holiness of life. The “Universal Call to Holiness” is addressed to all the members of the Church – laity, clergy and religious.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Why is belonging to a community of faith so necessary in our personal relationship with God?
2. In what ways is the Church considered a mystery of faith?
3. How is Jesus Christ at the center of our understanding of the Church?
4. What is the significance of the images of the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Acts 2

John 10: 1-10

Matthew 21: 33-43

1 Corinthians 3:9

Ephesians 2: 19, 22

Galatians 4: 26

“Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.”

Eucharistic Prayer III

“The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures. To fulfill the Father’s will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church “is the reign of Christ already present in mystery.” (CCC, 763)

“The Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ. She is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.” (CCC 779)

“Christ is the light of humanity...the Church has no other light than Christ’s; according to a favorite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun.” (CCC, 748)

“The Church is born primarily out of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. “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 as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the “wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.” (CCC, 766)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church,*” 748 – 870

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1-51

Saint Augustine, *Sermon*, 71, 20, 33

Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father