

SEGMENT EIGHT

THEME: ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 2: 43-47

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common...attending the temple together and breaking bread...and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” Acts 2:44-46

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

In the words of the Creed we profess “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” These four characteristics or “marks” of the Church indicate the essential features of the Catholic Church, her origin and her mission in the world. The Church does not possess these characteristics; rather we believe that it is Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes his Body, the Church, “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”

The word “Church” (Latin *ecclesia*) originally meant a convocation or assembly gathered for a religious purpose. In Christian usage the word “church” refers to the worshipping community, the local community or “parish” and the entire universal community of believers. (CCC, 751 – 752)

In the Old Testament God called the chosen people of Israel to be his holy people. The first Christians saw themselves as a continuation of that assembly. God created the world for communion with divine life and the Church is that community founded by Jesus Christ through which we grow in communion with God and with one another. In the Church, God now calls together all people into one community of faith, hope and love.

The Church was inaugurated by Jesus’ preaching and teaching and by his choice of twelve apostles with Peter as the head of the community. Ultimately the mystery of the visible and invisible reality of the Church is born from Jesus’ total self-giving on the Cross.

- ❖ Jesus Christ makes the Church “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Only in fidelity to Jesus’ teachings and his saving mission can the Church realize fully each of these qualities (CCC, 811-822)
- ❖ The Church is “ONE” because of her founder and source: Jesus Christ. But from its very beginning, the ONE Church is marked by a diversity that comes from the variety of gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Among the Church’s members there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. (CCC 813 – 815)
- ❖ The oneness of the Church is held together by “bonds of unity” or visible bonds of communion which are: above all charity, the profession of one faith received from the apostles, common celebration of the sacraments, and apostolic succession through Holy Orders (CCC, 815)
- ❖ The “sole Church of Christ is that which our Savior entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and pastor it...this Church, constituted and organized as a society in this present world, *subsists* in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by bishops in communion with him. Elements of sanctification and truth are also found outside its visible confines.” (CCC, 816)
- ❖ From the beginning divisions arose in the Church. Through the centuries large communities of Christians became separated from full communion – for which people of all sides were to blame. These divisions in the Body of Christ are a wound to Christian unity and contrary to the will of Christ. (CCC, 817-822)
- ❖ The Church is the “HOLY” People of God made holy by Christ, her founder. While holy the Church is composed of sinful members who are constantly in need of conversion. (CCC, 825 – 827)
- ❖ From time to time the Church *canonizes* saints, in whom the holiness of the Church shines. In canonizing saints the Church recognizes God’s sanctifying power in the lives of holy men and women and offers them to us as models of Christian living. (CCC, 828 – 829)
- ❖ The Church is “CATHOLIC” meaning universal. Christ is present in the Church and she proclaims the fullness of faith to all peoples and is present everywhere in the world. (CCC, 830 – 856)
- ❖ The Church is “APOSTOLIC” in that she is founded on the faith of the apostles. She continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the successors of the apostles, the bishops, assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Pope (CCC, 857 – 865)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Share new insights you have gained from your understanding of the “marks” of the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”
2. Just as we honor people of heroic virtue and extraordinary abilities in society, we honor the saints as “heroes of holiness.” Discuss examples of Christian saints, men and women, whose lives are models of Christian living for you.
3. On the eve of his passion and death Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples: “that they may all be one. As you Father and I are one, may they also be one in us” (John 17:21). Discuss the importance of efforts towards Christian unity among believers today?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

John 17: 21

Acts 2: 43- 47

Ephesians 4: 3-5

Matthew 16: 18

“The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect. In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired. Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state – though each in his own way – are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect” (CCC, 296)

“You are the eternal Shepherd who never leaves his flock untended. Through the apostles you watch over us and protect us always. You made them shepherds of the flock to share in the work of your Son...” (Roman Missal, Preface of the Apostles, I)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*”
Articles 811 – 870.

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen
Gentium*, Chapter I, articles 1-8

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, On the Eucharist in its
Relationship to the Church, Chapters 3 and 4, articles 26-46

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father