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The Church: The Body of Christ

2

FAITH FOCUS

How do images help us understand the mystery of the Church?

FAITH VOCABULARY

Body of Christ	Temple of the Holy Spirit
charisms	Marks of the Church
ecumenism	apostolic succession
Magisterium	infallibility

What things in life are a mystery to you?

Some situations are very difficult to understand or even seem to be beyond our understanding. Some problems seem too difficult to solve. We sometimes call such things mysteries. The Church is a mystery of faith.

Why do you think the Church is called a mystery?

World, Diana Ong (1940–),
Chinese-American artist.

[There is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.

EPHESIANS 4:5–6

The Mystery of the Church

A Mystery of Faith

We believe in many mysteries of faith. A mystery of faith is something we believe because God has revealed it and the Church teaches it. It is a truth of faith that we will never be able to understand fully, so vast is its meaning. No matter how much we learn about it, there will always be more than we can learn and understand about a mystery of faith.

One reason the Church is a mystery is that the Church is made up of both a visible, or human, reality and an invisible, or spiritual, reality. The Church is both a visible community with a hierarchical structure and

an invisible spiritual communion that mirrors the unity of the Holy Trinity. The Church is both an earthly reality that exists here and now on earth and a reality that exists beyond time and space in heaven, where the Lord reigns in glory surrounded by all the saints.

From the days of the early Church, Christians have used images to describe the nature and work of the Church. Each image in its own way tells us a partial truth about the mystery of the Church.



Images of the Church

The Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit are two images for the Church that are found in the New Testament.

The Body of Christ

The image of the **Body of Christ** compares the Church to the functioning of the human body. Saint Paul the Apostle writes:

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

As the parts of a physical body are united one to another, so Christians are united with one another in Christ. Christ is "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). Christ directs and gives life to us. Together we make up the "whole Christ."

Temple of the Holy Spirit

The image of the Church as the **Temple of the Holy Spirit** is used to describe the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church and within the hearts of the faithful. Saint Paul used this image in his First Letter to the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19). The Holy Spirit is the source of the richness of the Church's **charisms** (see 1 Corinthians 12:27–31). Charisms are special graces to be used "so that the church may be built up" (1 Corinthians 14:5).



Family Plan. Diana Ong (1940–), Chinese-American artist.

FAITH CONNECTION

Choose either the image "Body of Christ" or "Temple of the Holy Spirit." Describe what it helps you understand about the Church. Share your ideas with a partner.

The Marks of the Church

Each Sunday at Mass you pray the Nicene Creed. You profess, "We believe . . . in one holy catholic and apostolic Church." One, holy, catholic, and apostolic are the four **Marks of the Church**. The Marks of the Church are the essential features of the Church founded by Jesus Christ. They help us understand the mystery and mission of the Church.

The Church Is One

The Church is the one Body of Christ. The visible bonds of unity that unite Christ's followers as "one" include:

- profession of one faith received from the Apostles;
- common worship, especially Baptism, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments; and
- direct succession of bishops from the Apostles through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

These bonds of unity within the Church are found most fully in the Catholic Church. Non-Catholic Christians who

do not share fully with us in these bonds of unity today are joined to us "in some, although imperfect, communion" (*Decree on Ecumenism* 3). In these non-Catholic Christian communities, there are many elements of holiness and truth that are truly means of salvation for their members.

Jesus founded one Church. At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed:

"[M]ay all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

JOHN 17:21

All Christians must make Jesus' prayer their own prayer. We must pray and work for the restoration of the unity of the Church. We call this work of the Church **ecumenism**.

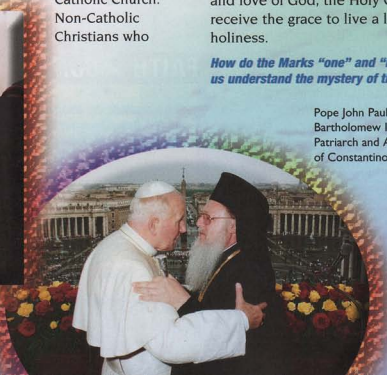
The Church Is Holy

The Church is holy because in Baptism we are joined to Christ, become adopted children of God the Father, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We share in the life and love of God, the Holy One. We receive the grace to live a life of holiness.

How do the Marks "one" and "holy" help us understand the mystery of the Church?

Pope John Paul II and Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch and Archbishop of Constantinople

Cardinal Idris Cassidy (left), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and German Bishop Christian Kraus (right), President of the Lutheran World Federation



Did you Know...

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897) was a Carmelite nun who during her religious life never traveled far beyond her convent. Yet Saint Thérèse was named the patron of foreign missions. Why is that? Thérèse dedicated her whole life to growing in holiness. She prayed not only for herself but for all others that they might become one with Jesus. In her autobiography, Thérèse wrote about the “little way” of striving for holiness or perfection. Many people today strive to grow in holiness each day by following Saint Thérèse’s “little way.”



Ordination of bishops

The Church Is Catholic

“Catholic” is the Mark of the Church that tells us that in God’s plan all people are to become one People of God. The Church of Christ that we profess in the Nicene Creed to be “one holy catholic and apostolic” can be found in its fullest in the Catholic Church.

What about all those people who are not baptized? The Catholic Church believes and trusts and teaches that God’s love has no limits. People who seek to follow God’s will according to their conscience and who through no fault of their own do not come to faith in Christ and his Church can still achieve eternal salvation. Their salvation comes about as a result of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Through his death on the cross and his Resurrection, Christ has won forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God for the entire human race. Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) in whom salvation is found. It is in this sense

that the Church teaches that all salvation—even the salvation of the unbaptized—comes from Christ through his Body, the Church.

The Church Is Apostolic

Apostolic means “from the time of the Apostles.” The Church has its origin and foundation in the life of the original Apostles whom Jesus chose to act in his name. Ever since that time, leadership in the Church has been handed down from Saint Peter and the other Apostles to the popes and bishops through the sacrament of Holy Orders. This connection of all popes and bishops back to Saint Peter and the first Apostles is called **apostolic succession**.

How do the Marks “catholic” and “apostolic” help us understand the mystery of the Church?



Did you Know...

Since the days of the early Church, the Apostles and their successors have written letters to teach and guide the Church. This tradition still exists today. The writing of pastoral letters is one way the bishops of the United States, either individually or together as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), instruct the faithful on Catholic teachings, worship, social concerns, and other topics that are important to the life of the Church.



Cardinals and bishops from around the world praying before a meeting at the Vatican

The Magisterium

The **Magisterium** is the living teaching authority and office of the Church, entrusted to the pope and the bishops by Christ. Jesus made Saint Peter the visible foundation, or rock, on which he would build the Church (see Matthew 16:18–19). Peter and his successors would be the “rock” and source of the unity of the Church founded by Jesus. The Church uses the term *College of Bishops* to name the unity of all the bishops (the successors of the Apostles) and the special leadership, or primacy, of the pope (the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle) among the bishops.

The pope as the successor of Saint Peter and head of the College of Bishops has a special authority in the Church. He has “supreme, full,

immediate, and universal power in the care of souls.” When the pope and the bishops act together in their capacity as the College of Bishops, they exercise supreme and full teaching authority over the universal Church.

Infallibility is the charism of the Holy Spirit given to the Church that guarantees that the official teaching of the pope or the pope and bishops on matters of faith and morals is without error. This charism is at work when:

- the pope teaches officially as the supreme pastor of the Church, or
- the College of Bishops teaches together with the pope.

The Catholic faithful are required to accept such teachings with the “obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26).

FAITH CONNECTION

Develop several interview questions you would like to ask your pastor about the teachings of the Catholic Church. Invite him to discuss the questions with the class.

OUR CHURCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Parish Councils

All the baptized are called to work together to build up the Church. One way we do this work is through parish councils. A parish council is made up of representatives of the parish family. These representatives are either appointed by the pastor or elected by parishioners and approved by the pastor.

The Work of Parish Councils

Parish councils help the pastor with his managerial and pastoral tasks. They work with him in such areas as finance, justice, education, and service. Parish councils foster a sense of community by developing and promoting programs that touch the lives of the members of the parish. They also help the parish reach out to the members of the wider community. Parish councils are often organized into dynamic committees. Examples of these committees include finance, administration, education, social justice, spiritual development, ecumenism, evangelism, and parish activities.

Sharing Our Gifts

A parish community contains a whole host of people who use their talents and skills to build up the Church and take part in her mission. For example, parishioners who are social workers, artists, nurses, skilled laborers, merchants, business leaders, secretaries, lawyers, doctors, educators, and so on, can use their gifts to help create vibrant faith communities.

Among the issues that councils tackle are the continuing need for parish volunteers, youth education, development and implementation of parish mission statements, caring for the needy, parent education, and the challenges of the fewer number of priests to serve a growing Catholic population.

How does your parish organize itself to touch the lives of both members of the parish and members of the wider community?



WHAT DIFFERENCE

Does Faith Make in My Life?

Belonging to Groups

We all have a basic need to belong. Humans were not made to live in isolation; we need other people. Yes, there are times when we choose to be alone, but we all like to belong to groups where we are accepted, have fun, and work together.



Through Baptism you have the wonderful gift of being joined to Christ and belonging to the Church, the Body of Christ. We all belong to the family of God. We have the responsibility of showing others that we are all God's children.

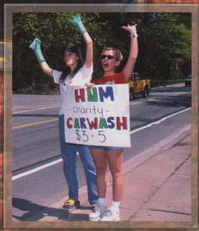
Throughout your life you will belong to many other groups. Your own families, classes in school, teams, clubs, and organizations are only a few examples. Members of a group share things with others, learn to trust each other, recognize one another's gifts and talents, and learn how to work together.

Sometimes it is a challenge to work with a group. To be a vibrant member of any group you have to learn how to get along, how to play fair, and how to work together for the common good of the group.



Here are some suggestions to help you be a responsible and valued member of any group.

- * Value being a member of the group.
- * Have a spirit of cooperation and an open mind.
- * Be respectful of other members and their ideas.
- * Express your opinions honestly, in a give-and-take of ideas.
- * Be a part of the planning of projects, the brainstorming of ideas, or the solution of problems.
- * Decide who will do what, when tasks will be accomplished.
- * Work cooperatively for the good of the group.
- * Meet your responsibilities.
- * Ask God's blessings on the group.
- * Pray for God's help in accomplishing your goals.



Faith Decision

- In your journal or on a piece of paper describe the best group to which you have ever belonged. Using the list on this page describe your experience in that particular group.
- Choose one suggestion from the list that you can work on developing so that you can be a more active member of your parish.

This week I will contribute to the work of my parish by

PRAY and REVIEW

Prayer of God's People

Leader:

O LORD, happy are those who trust in you.

All:

Happy are those who live in your Temple, singing praise to you.

Group 1:

I long to be in your Temple,

Group 2:

Even sparrows have built nests near your altars.

All:

Happy are those who live in your Temple, singing praise to you.

Group 1:

One day spent in your Temple is better than one thousand spent elsewhere.

Group 2:

I would rather be a doorkeeper at your Temple than live in the homes of the wicked.

All:

Happy are those who live in your Temple, singing praise to you.

Group 1:

The LORD is our protector, blessing us with love and honor.

Group 2:

The LORD does not withhold anything from those who do right.

All:

Happy are those who live in your Temple, singing praise to you.

BASED ON PSALM 84

Leader:

Lord God, you call us to be your Church. May we always be aware that we live in your presence, one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

FAITH VOCABULARY

Define each of these terms:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Body of Christ | 2. Temple of the Holy Spirit |
| 3. charisms | 4. Marks of the Church |
| 5. ecumenism | 6. apostolic succession |
| 7. Magisterium | 8. infallibility |

MAIN IDEAS

Choose either (a) or (b) from each set of items. Write a brief paragraph to answer each of your choices.

- (a) Discuss what it means to say the Church is a mystery.
(b) Describe how the images Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit help us understand the mystery of the Church.
- (a) Explain how the Marks of the Church help us understand the mystery of the Church.
(b) Explain how the work of the Magisterium helps us live as faithful and responsible members of the Church.

CRITICAL THINKING

Using what you have learned in this chapter, reflect on and explain this statement: God invites everyone to salvation.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

How is our family a sign that the Church is the Body of Christ?

For more ideas on ways your family can live your faith, visit the "Faith First for Families" page at www.FaithFirst.com. Also click on Teen Center and read this week's interactive story.

