



The Church Gives Life

Handing Over of the Keys



► *Pietro Perugino*

Returning to the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his **disciples**, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” At first no one got it right, misidentifying him as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. When Simon Peter spoke up and identified Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” Jesus commended Peter and promised he would build his Church upon him. Peter would be the rock of the Church and given the keys of the kingdom (see Matthew 16:13–28). The painting, *Handing Over of the Keys*, by Pietro Perugino (1446–1523), an Italian Renaissance painter, is part of a series of frescoes known as the Stories of Christ painted on the north wall of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican.

Pietro Perugino learned his craft among illustrious Renaissance painters. First studying in his hometown of Perugia in local workshops sponsored by artists such as Bartolomeo Caporali and Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, he later transferred to the larger city of Florence, where he served as an apprentice alongside rising artists, including Leonardo da Vinci. Later, he was himself a teacher of the artist Raphael.

Pietro was among the earliest artists to perfect oil painting, and he used that style to create several frescoes for a convent—eventually destroyed by fire—in Florence. *Handing Over of the Keys* was produced between 1481 and 1482. Pietro Perugino died in 1523.

Note the details in the foreground of the painting. Christ is handing the silver and gold keys to Peter, who is kneeling. The other Apostles are present, all depicted with halos. It is said that Pietro used his contemporaries as models. The fifth figure from the right is thought to be his self-portrait. In the background, there is a depiction of the Jerusalem Temple, serving to center the scene. In the middle background are two scenes from the life of Christ: an illustration of his teaching to “repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God” (Mt 22:21) on the left and his being stoned on the right.

In total, the painting represents Jesus setting the foundation of his Church with Peter, the Apostles, and their successors.

If you would like to learn more about the Stories of Christ series of frescoes at the Sistine Chapel, see Chapter 1 Review, Chapter Project 1.

disciples From the Latin for “learners,” those who learn from and follow Jesus Christ and who accept a share of his ministry in the world.



Focus Question

What is the purpose of the Church?

Introduction

A Church of Intimacy and Self-Giving

Section 1

Hearing the Call of the Church

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Jesus Christ Founded the Church

Section 3

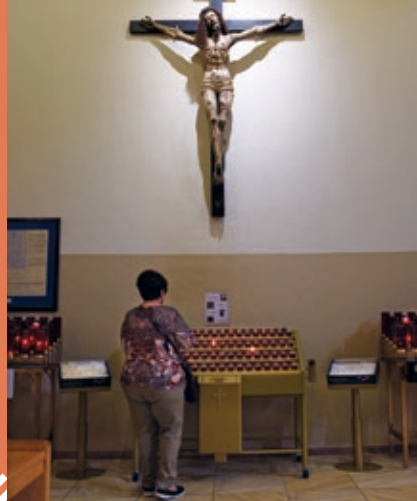
What Does It Mean to Be Saved?

Section 4

The Study of the Church

Introduction

A CHURCH OF INTIMACY AND SELF-GIVING



We are not *compelled* to believe in and follow God; God made us free so that we can make the choice for union with him on our own. Nevertheless, God provides us with his grace so that we can desire him, and there is a biological aspect to this desire. Within our bodies he has made us so that we long to participate in the eternal love of God, the type of love shared between the Three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We experience something similar to our yearning for God in our sexual drive to be intimately connected to another person, expressed in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

While not a perfect image of the intimate love God has for us, marriage *is* a wonderful demonstration on earth of how God wants to love us. Think about what you have witnessed in a holy marriage between a man and woman. First, their love is unconditional. They promise to love each other in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, and in good times and in bad times. The man and woman love each other unselfishly, placing the needs of the other first. One way this is expressed is in conjugal love that does not separate the unitive dimension of sexual intercourse from the procreative dimension. “Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 49).

Whether you will ever be married or not, you are called to a spousal relationship with Christ. In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul compared the love husbands and wives share with how Christ loves the Church. Paul went on to describe the Church as Christ’s beloved Bride for whom he gave himself up so that she would be holy (see Ephesians 5:21–32). “The Church,” wrote Pope John Paul II, “cannot . . . be understood . . . unless we keep in mind the ‘great mystery’ . . . expressed in the ‘one flesh’ of marriage and the family.”¹

As you begin to study the meaning of the Church in more depth, keep the intimacy and life-giving sharing that exist between a man and woman in marriage in the forefront of your thoughts. This is the type of deep physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual union God desires to have with you. In the same way that God has gifted you with your life in this world and sacrificed himself so that you have the possibility of eternal happiness with him in the next world, he wants to share his life with you right now through his presence in the Catholic Church. He also wants you to share your life with him through your own self-giving.

Examples of Self-Giving

A husband and wife give of themselves unselfishly to each other in many everyday ways. For example, a wife getting ready for work a few minutes before her husband uses the light of her phone to find her clothes in the closet so as not to disturb him by turning on the bedside lamp. Then, upon rising himself, the husband gets the coffee brewing for his wife and goes out to the garage to warm up her car. Unselfishness and self-giving are also prominent in larger decisions in a marriage. Imagine the wife who orchestrates several family moves from place to place to support her husband's career, or the husband who passes up a new job because it would leave less time for him to spend with his wife and children.

We have been created by an unselfish God who gave of himself in becoming not only human, but a *poor* human who ultimately gave up his life for the benefit of sinners. Christians ever since have attempted to imitate this trait of self-giving. Consider these two examples.

“To Die in His Place”

Maximilian shuffled into line along with the other prisoners. He was miserable, and so was everyone else. The sweltering sun burned overhead while insects buzzed in their faces. Awful odors of filth and dirt and death reached their nostrils. The cruel soldiers marched up and down the ranks, explaining the ugly truth of their situation. A prisoner had escaped overnight. In retribution, ten prisoners would die, and they would die slowly and in agony.

It was 1941, and the men were prisoners at the infamous Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz. The commander chose the ten helpless men randomly, calling out their prison numbers. They were all terrified and stepped forward with looks of despair on their faces. But one of them broke down

completely. He fell to the ground wailing, “I have a wife and two boys. What will become of them?”

Then Maximilian stirred to life. He walked directly up to the commander and stood in front of him. “What do *you* want?” the officer snarled. “I want to die in his place,” Maximilian replied. The German was stunned. When he learned that Maximilian was a Catholic priest, he agreed. The father’s life was spared that day.

Maximilian was taken with the nine others to a bunker, where they slowly starved to death over the next two weeks. He encouraged and cared for the others until he was the last one alive. Then he was injected with poison to hasten his death.

Maximilian was a Franciscan friar who was later canonized by the Catholic Church and is today known as St. Maximilian Kolbe. The man he saved, Franciszek Gajowniczek,



St. Maximilian Kolbe

Franciszek Gajowniczek

Franciszek Gajowniczek, prisoner number 5659, the Polish sergeant whom Maximilian Kolbe saved, spent five years, five months, and nine days at Auschwitz after being transferred from another Nazi prison in Tarnów in south-eastern Poland. He had been captured while crossing into Slovakia following a defeat of his military unit during the 1939 invasion of Poland by the Nazis.

Gajowniczek’s wife, Janina, said of her husband, “Ever since the war he had a deep sense of Kolbe’s presence and a feeling Kolbe will know when to take him.” Gajowniczek died at the age of ninety-four in 1995. Gajowniczek was a special guest at both the beatification of Maximilian Kolbe in 1971 and his canonization by Pope John Paul II in 1982.



was reunited with his wife and lived another fifty-three years, telling everyone how grateful he was for the heroic sacrifice of Maximilian Kolbe.²

“Saint Mommy”

Gianna faced an impossible choice. As a physician herself, she knew her doctor was right: if her pregnancy continued, her own life was in peril. But she could not bring herself to end her little baby’s life.

Gianna and her husband, Pietro, lived in northern Italy. They had been married for more than six years, and she was already the mother of three children. They were excited about the addition to their family, looking forward to filling their home with even more joy. Then came the bad news. There was a tumor growing in Gianna’s womb that posed a threat to her life and the baby’s life. Removing the uterus would likely save the mother, but it meant certain death for the baby. Gianna had been a doctor for more than ten years and understood well the consequences of the choice she faced. She decided to have the cancerous tumor removed but insisted that the baby be protected at all costs.

Because of the risk level of the pregnancy and Gianna’s choice to protect her unborn child, it became necessary to deliver the baby via caesarean section. The day before Easter, Gianna went into surgery and a healthy baby girl was born. A week later, on April 28, 1962, the mother of four died of complications from the operation.

Like Maximilian, Gianna has been recognized by the Church as a saint: St. Gianna Molla. Her fourth child, Gianna Emanuela, the girl born on Holy Saturday, grew up to be a doctor like her mother.[∞] She also shares her story with the world, expressing her gratitude for the generosity and example of the woman she calls “Saint Mommy.”³



St. Gianna Molla with her daughter.

No Greater Love

Jesus said that there is no greater love than to give your life for another person (see John 15:13). At some level, everyone—Christian or not—understands this. We all

hold in esteem the firefighter who rushes into a burning building to save a person who cannot get out, or the person who gives up an organ for a relative who needs a replacement. Likewise, the radical love shown by St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Gianna Molla, and many other saints throughout history who not only sacrificed their lives for others but did so in the name of Jesus Christ is universally admired. In these latter cases, they not only allowed others to have life in this world but inspired many others to do what it takes to gain eternal life in the next world.

At the head of all those who have given their lives for others stands Jesus himself. Because he refused to deny the truth about who he was, Jesus suffered and was killed. But Jesus's Death on the Cross was both different from and more than the other examples previously covered.

St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Gianna Molla had the opportunity to give another person life in this world, which is an amazing gift. But Jesus did something greater. He gave us life *for eternity*. Because Jesus is the Son of God, when he gave his life for us, he made a sacrifice that had the power to save everyone, everywhere, for all time. His Death gave us the chance to live forever.



∞ Note

Gianna Emmanuel Molla chose Springfield, Illinois, as the location of a spiritual pilgrimage center to honor both her mother and her father. The center will include a replica of the spousal home of Gianna and Pietro as it was in Ponte Nuovo of Magenta in Milan, Italy; a pilgrim center; a replica of the original Chapel of Our Lady of Good Counsel with attached rectory as it was at her parents' parish in Ponte Nuovo; a shrine church of St. Gianna; and a rectory for visiting clergy.

Some people who witnessed what Jesus did and understood what his Death meant were willing to follow his example. In the first three centuries of the Church, many Christians were martyred for their faith when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. They were the followers, or disciples, of Christ, the beginning of what we now call “the Church.” Catholics today belong to this same Church, whose members, when first initiated at Baptism, are “baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3). This is quite a challenge to accept.

In this course, you will explore what it means to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ by taking a close look at the Church’s teachings and how her members through every age have attempted to live them out. You will encounter many diverse examples of Catholics who came before us and found ways to follow Christ in their own circumstances. The intimate marriage-like relationship God wants with you begins with your participation in the Catholic Church because Jesus, who is at the center of the Church, is the source of that relationship and of your call to eternal life. Catholics who take up Jesus’s Cross and follow him (see Matthew 16:24) do so with the intention of living in close intimacy with God now and in the future.

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. Why did the Nazi guard accept Maximilian Kolbe’s offer to substitute himself for Franciszek Gajowniczek’s death sentence?
2. How did Maximilian Kolbe die?
3. What was the difficult choice that Gianna Molla had to make?
4. How did Jesus’s Death on the Cross differ from the sacrifices of St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Gianna Molla?

Reflection

5. How do you imagine a relationship with God even more intimate than that between a husband and wife in marriage?

Section 1

HEARING THE CALL OF THE CHURCH



In the late days of the Roman Empire, in the mid fourth century, a brilliant young man was living a lost life. Augustine had always been a searcher, looking for something he couldn't seem to find. He had tried to find happiness in partying, in sexual relationships, and in dominating others with his intelligence and sharp tongue. When all that failed, he looked for comfort in strange religious ideas, including *Manicheism*, the beliefs of a heretical group that did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Old Testament for Christians, but none of it worked. "I searched about for something to love," he lamented, "but my soul was far from well."

Then he heard someone calling. It was the singsong voice of a neighborhood child chanting the lyrics of a song that went "Take up and read." There was a book near Augustine, a collection of the Letters of St. Paul. Augustine followed the message of the lyrics and began to read from the Scripture.[∞] Then he experienced a different sort of calling, an internal sense of what his purpose in life was. As he finished reading the passage, he recalled, "All the darkness of doubt vanished away." In the teachings of Jesus as recounted by St. Paul, Augustine finally began to find what he'd been looking for.

∞ Note

Augustine described picking up the Letters of St. Paul: "I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: 'Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh' (Rom 13:13–14)" (*Confessions*, VIII, 12).

Augustine began a process of conversion.[∞] He prayed more and followed the laws of Christian morality. He was baptized and, despite his previous life of sin and aimlessness, went on to become a bishop and one of the most important theologians in the history of the Church. St. Augustine of Hippo shared his story of conversion with others by writing a book known as his *Confessions*, which is still in print and popular more than 1,500 years later. In the *Confessions*, St. Augustine described his experience in what has become perhaps the most famous line in all of Christian literature. Addressing God, he wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” St. Augustine had been restless because he wasn’t listening for God’s voice. He started following Christ because he heard the call to do so.⁴

Origins of the Church

Hearing a call as St. Augustine did is at the heart of the experience of being a member of the Church. The English word *church* comes from a Greek word, *ekklesia*, which means “people called together.” *Ekklesia* was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the Jewish people when they were gathered together at Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel were called by God to come together to receive his teaching, leading them to be known as the “Chosen People.” They had been called, or chosen, by God to be witnesses to the rest of the world of God’s identity and teachings.

The Ten Commandments were a sign of God’s continuing **covenant** with the Chosen People. The covenant God established was an irrevocable bond. God promised his love and care and in return expected the Chosen People to respond in gratitude by way of ethical living, summarized later by Jesus in the Great Commandment to love God and to love one’s neighbor (see, for

∞ Note

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines *conversion* as “a radical reorientation of the whole life away from sin and evil, and toward God” (Glossary).

covenant A binding and solemn agreement between humans or between God and people, holding each to a particular course of action.

apostates Baptized Christians who deny Christ and repudiate the Christian faith.

example, Matthew 22:37–40). The accounts of key figures in the Old Testament—Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David—tell of God’s People repeatedly turning away from him. Yet God remained faithful, calling them back and renewing his covenant with them multiple times. As St. Augustine found out centuries later, there is always a chance to make amends with God and start over.

These Old Testament accounts also reveal the way God gradually prepared the world for the founding of his Church. In the time of Noah, the ark served as a vessel for saving those who followed God’s commands—an image of the role of the Church in the world today. St. Cyprian, a third-century North African bishop, recognized that the Church, like Noah’s Ark, was the one and only place God could save us. He wrote that “the one ark of Noah is a type of the one Church.”⁵ He said this in reference to the *lapsi*, that is, **apostates** who had denied Christ during the time of the Roman persecutions. He advocated for their forgiveness and return to the Church after Christianity was legalized in 313.

After the waters of the Great Flood had receded, God established a covenant with Noah and his descendants, promising never again to destroy the earth’s inhabitants in that manner. This covenant was renewed and strengthened when God promised to make a great nation from the descendants of Abraham. The gathering of the Israelites in the time of Moses and God’s gift of the Law on Mount Sinai definitively established them as the People of God, the Chosen People. It is easy to recognize how the Church today is rooted in the experience of the people of Israel. Like the Chosen People, the Church consists of those called by God to gather and receive his Word. Here are some ways the Church resembles the Chosen People:



The commandments given to the people gathered at Mount Sinai—worship the one true God; honor your parents; do not kill; do not lie—still serve as the foundation for living a Christian life.



Rejecting the false teaching of the Manicheans, Christians still recognize the Old Testament as part of their Sacred Scriptures.



The first followers of Christ were Jews—descendants of Abraham who had been formed as a people in the time of Moses.

Today, there is a great focus on individualism. There is nothing wrong with promoting and celebrating your individuality: God created you uniquely in his own divine image. Individualism is only a problem when it drives people apart from one another. When this happens, the individual creates his or her own definition of self and the world. This leads to people rejecting a crucial function of the Church: to call people who believe in God to come together to worship, pray, socialize, and serve. People with an individualistic philosophy often reject this call to come together when there is disagreement between the individual's definition of self and the Church's understanding of what it means to be human. The bottom line is that many people today do not feel that belonging to the Church is vital to maintaining a relationship with God.

"Here Comes Everybody"

Contrary to the negative aspects of individualism, God intends for all people to come together and participate in the human family and in his own life via the Church. In the famous passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul wrote: "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). The Catholic Church not only calls all people to belong; she needs all people to do their part to make the Church function ideally.

Those who are not Catholic sometimes view the Church as an exclusive club with rigid rules that, if broken, cast a person out. This isn't so. Twentieth-century priest and sociologist Fr. Andrew Greeley pointed out that the Church has always had a "rich, complex, diversified, pluralistic heritage." The purpose of the Church is to cast "her boundaries out as far as possible, to include everyone she can." Greeley cited Irish poet James Joyce, who is known for defining the Catholic Church as "Here comes everybody."⁶

Because Christ's Death on the Cross was intended to win salvation for all—Jews and Gentiles who accepted him and those who didn't—and because his Church is the instrument he chose to perpetuate his presence in the world, all



people have a connection with the Church and are called to participate in the Church. This means that anyone who is seeking to live according to God's design is thereby connected in one way or another to the Catholic Church. This is why the truths discussed in this course are relevant to all students, Catholic or not.

To clarify further, those who are baptized as Catholic and practice their faith are clearly members of the "visible" Church. They are located within the boundaries of the Catholic Church and form an identifiable group of Christ's disciples, but the Church is not reducible to her visible boundaries. The Church is also a spiritual reality that extends her reach into all hearts who long for God. Those who are baptized into a Christian tradition other than Catholicism, such as Protestant and Orthodox Christians, are still closely connected to the Church. They have received the Sacrament of Baptism, which brings them into the family of God and identifies them as followers of Christ. Those who adhere to one of the other "Abrahamic" religions, Judaism and Islam, also have ties to the Church. They recognize the one God and see the beginning of God's covenant with humanity in the call of Abraham.

Even those who follow other religions or do not identify with organized religion at all have access to the saving power of Jesus and his Church. Pope John Paul II declared that "the universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all." He observed that "today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions." For non-Catholics such as these, "salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 10).



The reality of the Church is therefore relevant to all. Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, and others are all called to embrace the truth about God and his relationship with us. We are all called to knowledge of the Church, which can lead us to understand how the Church facilitates our growth in wisdom, grace, and unity with God and others and brings about the salvation of our souls and a path to eternal life.

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. What did St. Augustine read when he picked up the Bible after hearing the child sing?
2. What is the meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*?
3. Name three ways that the Church resembles the Chosen People.
4. How are non-Catholic Christians, Jews, Muslims, and those who do not identify with any religion nevertheless connected to the Church?

Vocabulary

5. What is the two-sided nature of a *covenant*?
6. Define *apostate*.

Reflection

7. Explain the meaning of St. Augustine's most famous quotation, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you."
8. What are one positive and one negative aspect about individualism when it comes to participating in the Church?
9. How does the James Joyce quotation "Here comes everybody" describe the Catholic Church?

Section 2

JESUS CHRIST FOUNDED THE CHURCH



As chronicled in the Old Testament, God acts over and over to form a people who are chosen not because of merit, but simply because of his compassion and love for them. Although the Israelites (later called “Jews”) as a people frequently abandoned the demands of a loving relationship with God, he refused to abandon them. They were a people bound by a promise, a covenant, that was not of their making.

In fact, in spite of their ongoing sinfulness, God announced through the prophets a new and eternal covenant. He was committed to the Jewish people as a faith community from which his own Son, Jesus, would be born. When the proper time came, God himself became a member of that community. The only Son of God was entrusted not only to this Chosen People, but to humanity itself. In the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity came down from heaven and assumed human nature. It was through this event that God instituted the **New Covenant** through Christ and specifically through his **Paschal Mystery**: “He called a people together made up of Jews and Gentiles, which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and it would be the new people of God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 9).

Whether you have considered the following statement many times before or only now, it’s important to acknowledge that no matter your level of belief, the following is objectively true: *Jesus, besides being truly God, was a historical*

New Covenant The climax of salvation history; the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of God’s revelation.

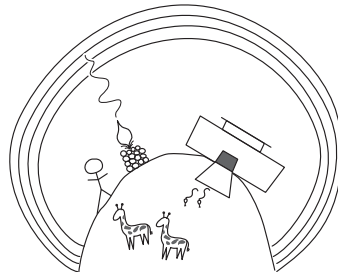
Paschal Mystery Christ’s work of redemption, accomplished principally by his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension. The mystery is commemorated and made present through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

person who lived in a particular time and place (first-century Palestine). It isn't possible to prove every detail of Jesus's life, Death, or Resurrection, and people will continue to debate those matters until the end of time, but the findings of historians show that it is reasonable to believe the accounts of the Gospels. The Gospels do not contradict what we know from history, and they provide strong evidence for the truth of the Church's claims about Jesus: that he was the Son of God who died and rose from the dead. By doing so, Jesus showed that God has power over death.

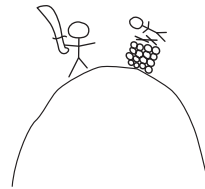
The Church, therefore, is not founded on an idea or a myth or a legend but on a real, historical person. Jesus founded the Church, and by his words and actions shaped her form and structure. For example, even as the twelve tribes of Israel were the backbone of the Jewish faith and nation, so the Twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus were the "foundation stones of the new Jerusalem," the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 765). In instituting his Church, Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Kingdom of God Is Present in the Church

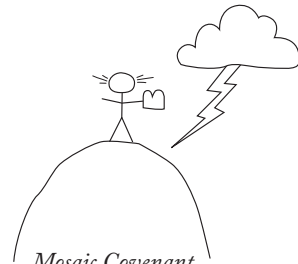
What is meant by "Kingdom of God"? You might think of it as "the world as God would have it be." Or think of it this way: The Kingdom of God is a state of "already, not yet." What this means is that in Jesus of Nazareth the Kingdom of God is already present in a new, unprecedented way. At the same time,



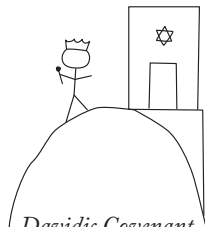
Noachic Covenant



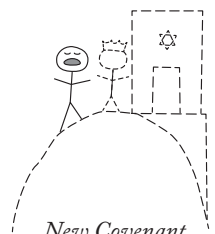
Abrahamic Covenant



Mosaic Covenant



Davidic Covenant



New Covenant

God's Kingdom has not yet transformed all creation; that will not take place until the end of history. In the meantime, the Church is the way to salvation. This "already, but not yet" quality of the Church is evident in many of the parables that Jesus told about the Kingdom. For example, in one parable Jesus said that the Kingdom of God "is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade" (Mk 4:31–32).⁷

It is also important to understand how the Chosen People and the Law of Mount Sinai from the Old Testament are related to Jesus, the Church, and the Kingdom. Christ did not come to abolish the Law of Mount Sinai, also known as the Mosaic Law or the Old Law (see Matthew 5:17). But he did preach a radically new understanding of it. Jesus explicitly taught that the love of God and neighbor must guide all of the laws. The "Good News" that Jesus preached to the world was therefore not merely a new written code to replace the faithful application of the 613 laws of the Torah.⁸ The Good News is more *who Jesus is* and *what he did*. By his own life—his suffering, dying, and rising—he repaired the damage done by sinfulness and defeated the wages of sin—that is, death—that had been present since Adam and Eve.

The Church Was Born on the Cross

You may have noticed that Catholics wear around their necks or display in their homes a crucifix instead of a plain cross. What's the difference? A crucifix has the *corpus* (body) of Christ on it, and a plain cross does not. The intention is to be mindful that there is no resurrection of the bodies of the saved without the Death of Jesus on the Cross. St. Augustine wrote: "The death of the Lord our God should not be a cause of shame for us; rather, it should be our greatest hope, our greatest glory." Similarly, the use of a crucifix

∞ Note

The number of 613 laws is mostly symbolic. Third-century AD Jewish Rabbi Simlai came up with the number of 613 precepts of the Mosaic Law: 365 negative precepts, corresponding to the number of solar days in a year, and 248 positive precepts, corresponding to the number of "limbs" (joints, or bones, covered with flesh and sinews) in a man's body.

Why Is the Church a “She”?

Focus Question: What is the purpose of the Church?

You may already have noticed that the pronouns used for the Church in this text are feminine ones: *she* and *her*. Why give personal pronouns to the Church at all, you may wonder, and why make them feminine?

The use of feminine pronouns for the Church comes directly from the Scriptures. In the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul assigns a female pronoun to his description of the Church. In a famous passage comparing the relationship between husbands and wives to the relationship between Christ and the Church, he writes: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25–27).

There are other New Testament passages that emphasize the feminine description of the Church. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul compares the community to a bride that will be presented “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2). In the Book of Revelation, the Church is once again described as the bride who is in a covenant relationship with God: “For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, / his bride has made herself ready” (Rv 19:7).

The image of the Church as the bride and Christ as the Bridegroom has been taught by the Church in all the centuries since her founding. “The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb” (CCC, 796). For these reasons, the Church continues to be referred to with the feminine pronouns *she* and *her* over the impersonal *it*.

Further Study and Reflection

- In your own words, explain how Christ’s relationship with the Church is like a husband’s relationship with his wife.
- Read John 3:28–30. How does this passage support the feminine identification of the Church?