

People of God

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." ~ 2 Corinthians 6:16-18

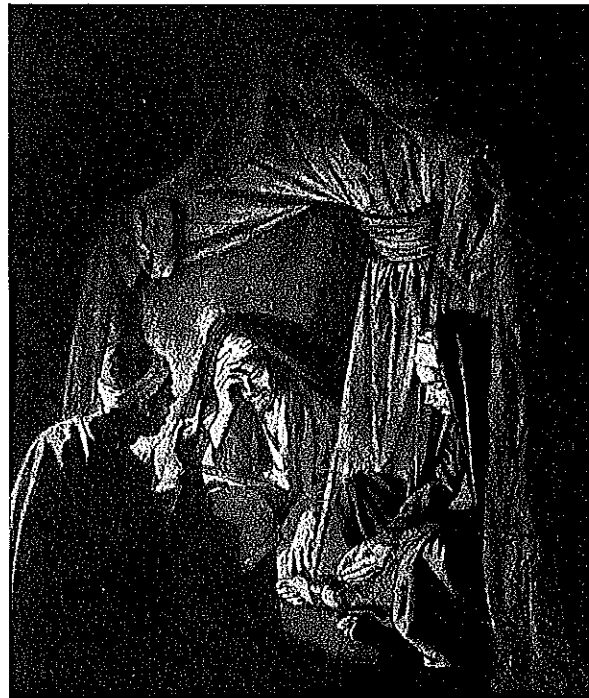
IN CREATING THE WORLD, God the Father had in his heart the desire to create men and women to live together both in communion with himself and with the created order. The human family was to be a people created and called into communion with God. The book of Genesis tells us what happened when Adam and Eve sinned, rejected God's friendship, and were alienated from God. God's providence allowed this to happen in order to show the depths of his love in sending his Son Jesus to heal the wounds of division caused by sin and to restore us to friendship with him as the People of God, the Church.

The plan of God, however, was not realized overnight but, according to the history narrated in the Old Testament, was fulfilled in stages. At the very moment our first parents fell, God made his first covenant with them, promising a savior who will defeat Satan (see Gn 3:15). God next made a covenant with the eight members of the family of Noah (see Gn 9:8-17), and then with Abraham as the patriarch of his tribe, promising to make him the father of many nations (see Gn 17:1-14). At the foot of Mount Sinai, God, through Moses, made a covenant with the Israelites as his Chosen People (see Ex 19:3-6). With David the king of the Israelites, God made a covenant promising to the line of David a perpetual Kingdom (see 2 Sm 7:9-16), a promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of David, our eternal high King (see Mt 16:16; Mt 21:9; Mt 25:31). Through these covenants, God the Father was preparing the world for the Church that would bring to fulfillment, in the new and final covenant in the blood of Jesus (see Lk 22:20), his desire to draw all people to himself (see Jn 12:32) and establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth (see handout on The Covenants of

God with Us for a fuller discussion). The Church, as that People of God called into fellowship with the Trinity, realizes "the plan of the mystery bidden for ages" (Eph 3:9), as St. Paul says, by communicating the grace and merit of Christ to the world.

The Church, united in Christ and entrusted with his authority and grace, is God's in-

"Through Baptism, the Christian becomes a member of the People of God."



Union in Prayer, by James Tissot, 1836-1902

strument or sacrament through which communion with him is made possible. "As sacrament," explains the *Catechism*, "the Church is Christ's instrument. 'She is ... the universal sacrament of salvation,' by which Christ is 'at once manifesting and

actualizing the mystery of God's love for men"¹ (CCC 776). Through the working of grace, Christ reunites all people and fashions them into the one People of God. St. Clement of Alexandria wrote: "Just as God's will is creation and is called 'the world,' so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called 'the Church'"² (CCC 760). The Church is thus the goal of creation; "the world was created for the sake of the Church"³ (CCC 760).

The call of Christ is for the Church to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). For this reason the Church, spread throughout the world and seeking always to bring the message of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it, is a family of a great diversity of cultures. Wounded by sin, we too often succumb to the temptation to divisiveness, rather than heed the call to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). We, all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, are called to belong to the People of God, restoring our original unity under Christ our Head. We know that God gives grace to all to seek and find him; and "in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35).

As the People of God united in Christ, the Church participates in his ministry. Christ came as the true priest whose sacrifice was acceptable to the Father; as the true prophet whose message revealed the fullness of God's plan of salvation and the mystery of the Church; and as the true king whose throne has been established forever and made visible on earth through the Church. Through Baptism, the Christian becomes a member of the People of God and is given a share in each of these roles. The priestly office of God's people is realized through the sacraments of the Church. Baptism, the door to all the other sacraments, regenerates the human

soul and establishes the People of God as "a spiritual house, ... a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5) (see handout on The Priesthood of the Faithful). As a prophetic people, the Church witnesses to the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the example of authentic Christian living. Finally, the Church is a royal (kingly) people when its members, like their master who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28), make themselves the servant of others, especially the poor and the neglected. The kingship of Christ can only be extended through works of charity, because only love has the power to change hearts and bring people to conversion.

In a mysterious way, Jews who have not accepted the Christian faith live still under the covenants that God has made with them, even though those covenants have been fulfilled and surpassed in Christ, for "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29) and "they are be-

loved for the sake of their forefathers" (Rom 11:28). They were the recipients of the entirety of God's promises and covenants, right through the New Covenant in Jesus' blood which was intended first of all for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (see Mt 15:24), but which many of those living at the time of Jesus rejected. Although the Jews still look for the coming of the Messiah, rather than to his return as do Christians, we share a desire for his coming.

"The Church 'is the visible plan of God's love for humanity,' because God desires 'that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit'"⁴ (CCC 776). At the end of time, God's plan will be completely fulfilled, and everyone that Jesus has redeemed will be gathered together as one People of God.

(CCC 758-762, 776, 781-786, 814, 831, 836, 839-840, 865)

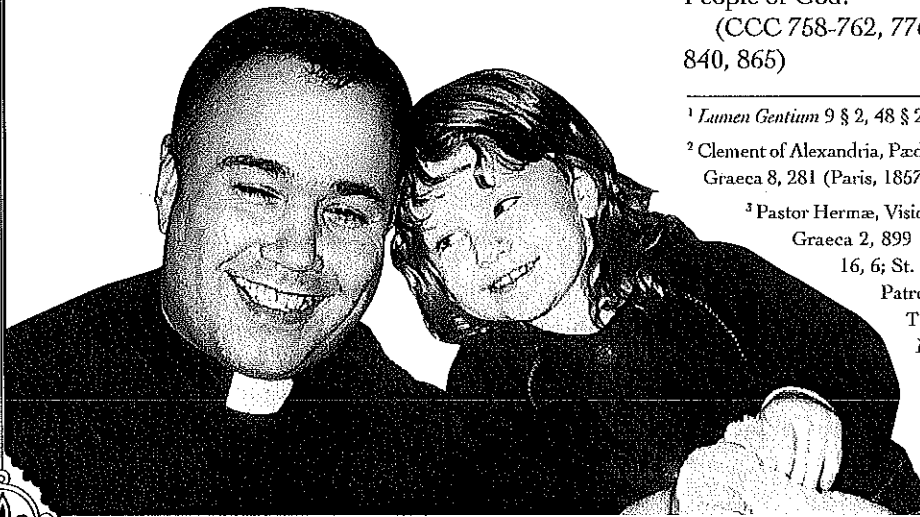
¹ *Lumen Gentium* 9 § 2, 48 § 2; *Gaudium et Spes* 45 § 1

² Clement of Alexandria, *Pæd.* 1, 6, 27 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 8, 281 (Paris, 1857-1866)

³ Pastor Hermæ, *Vision* 2, 4, 1 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 2, 899 (Paris, 1857-1866); cf. Aristides, *Apol.* 16, 6; St. Justin, *Apol.* 2, 7 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 6, 456 (Paris, 1857-1866); Tertullian, *Apol.* 31, 3; 32, 1 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 1, 508-509 (Paris: 1841-1855)

⁴ Paul VI, June 22, 1973; *Ad Gentes* 7 § 2; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 17

"The Church is the visible plan of God's love for humanity"



The Church is Apostolic

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. ~ Ephesians 2:19-22

THE SALVATION of the human race is bound up with the apostles. In his own mysterious and loving plan, the Son of God called and appointed twelve men to enter a relationship with him that was altogether unique (see Mk 3:13-19). He lived and ate with them, listened to and consoled them, taught and admonished them. He trusted them with his very life and gave them a share in his own miraculous power. In this, he raised them to a level of intimacy with God that was not only unsurpassed, but could hardly be expressed or imagined. They found themselves lifted to the heights of divine friendship (see Jn 15:15) and became *"partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Pt 1:4). It was only fitting, therefore, that after accomplishing our salvation, Jesus entrusted to these men his own saving mission (see Mk 16:15) and granted them, for

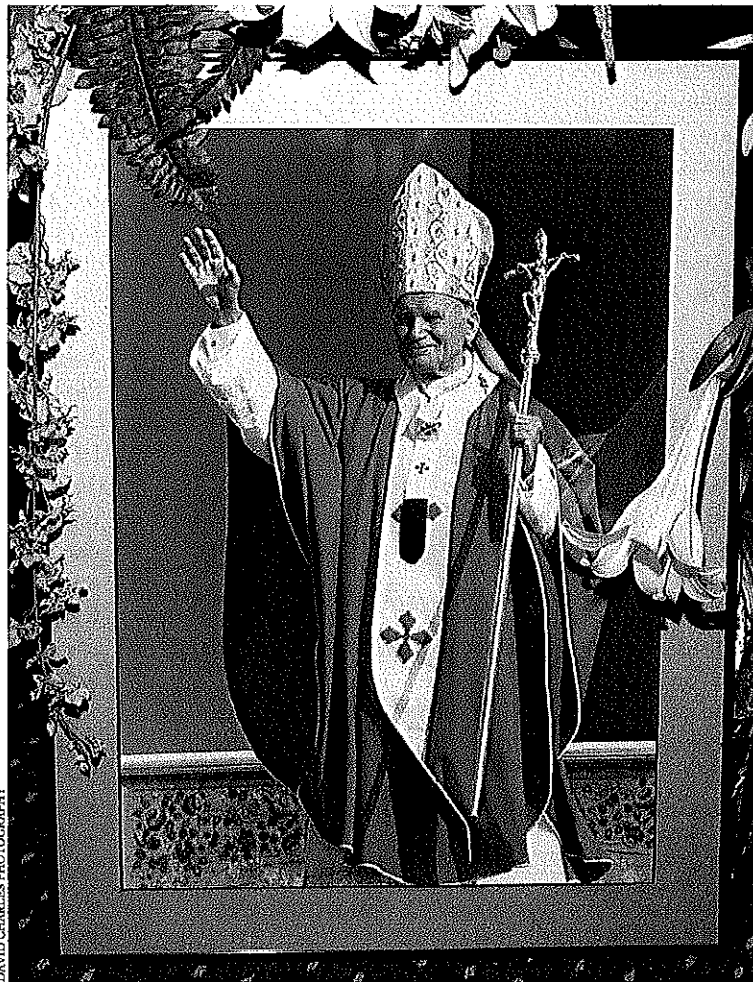
"Apostolicity is essential to its authenticity."

the sake of us all, a firm pledge of his own divine authority (see Mt 28:18-20; Jn 20:21-23). It is through them and their successors that the divine grace won for us by Jesus on the cross, and the fullness of his saving message, are communicated to the world.

A careful reading of the Gospels reveals that, for

Jesus, everything depended on the apostles. He himself wrote nothing down, and he often pulled the apostles aside to explain what was misunderstood or to reveal what he had hidden from the crowds and the other disciples. When they asked why he spoke to the people in parables, Jesus replied, *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been given"* (Mt 13:11).

Although anyone who fears God and does what is good is acceptable to him (see Acts 10:35),

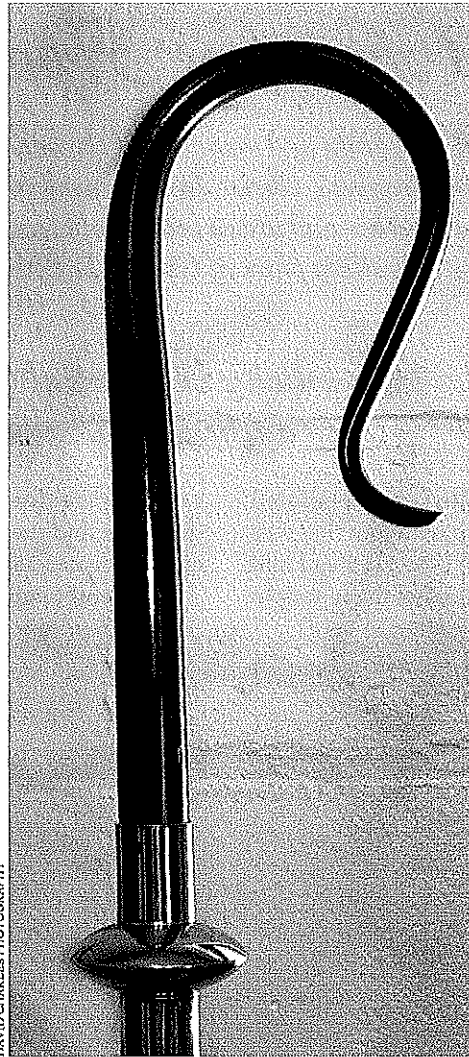


Pope John Paul II, reigning from 1978-2005, has been succeeded by Pope Benedict XVI, the 264th successor to the Apostle Peter

God wills to save us and make us holy as a "people" who are bonded and linked together in unity and charity. The calling of the Israelite race and God's desire to make them his own attests to this. Nevertheless, Israel was called in *anticipation* of the redemption and a *new people* who would be gathered together from every tribe and nation. Together, in all the reality and power of Jesus' death and Resurrection, they would become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... who once were no people but now are God's people" (1 Pt 2:9-10).

This new "People of God" was destined to be gathered, governed, and sanctified by "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rv 21:14). They knew that God was calling them to be "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6), "servants of God" (2 Cor 6:4), "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20), "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1). They were sent to preach the Gospel that converts hearts, establish believers in communities of faith, and administer the sacraments that give the graces necessary for salvation. In short, they were called to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, namely, the Church. Thus, the one Church established by Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity is an *apostolic* Church. Apostolicity is essential to its authenticity. It is founded upon the apostles and built upon Peter, chosen from amongst them (see Lk 22:31-32; Jn 21:15-17), with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

Since our Lord intended to be with us until "the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), the apostles needed to



A bishop's crozier, symbolizing his office of shepherd of Christ's flock

"Every bishop, every priest, and every deacon can trace his ministerial powers through the laying on of hands of a bishop who himself can trace his ordination directly to the apostles themselves."

mission. It is the task of every Christian to spread the Kingdom of Christ to all people.

(CCC 75-79, 815-816, 857-865)

choose successors to themselves. We see this first in the Acts of the Apostles, when St. Peter initiates the selection of a successor to Judas the traitor (see Acts 1:15-26). St. Peter identifies this succession as one taking the "office" of Judas (see Acts 1:20). As the Church spread beyond Judea into the Gentile world, it became essential to appoint additional individuals to oversee the various local churches, as we read in St. Paul's letters (see Phil 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1; Ti 1:7; the English word "bishop" derives from the Greek *episkopos*, which means "overseer"). And we learn also from St. Paul that, in his role as apostle, he had the power to appoint others to serve as priests: "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Ti 1:5). This transfer of authority occurs by the laying on of hands, as we read in the book of Acts (see Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3) and in St. Paul's letter to his disciple, the bishop St. Timothy (see 2 Tm 1:6). It is the firm tradition of the Church that every bishop, every priest, and every deacon can trace his ministerial powers through the laying on of hands of a bishop who himself can trace his ordination directly to the apostles themselves.

The Church is also apostolic in the sense that, united to the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, the Church is sent out to convert the whole world. Hence, all members of the Church are called in various ways to fulfill the apostolic

One, Holy, Catholic. . .

"Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God, . . . And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ~ Revelation 21:9-10, 14

WE PROFESS IN THE CREED, "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." Traditionally these four characteristics are called the *four marks* of the Church. The first three marks are discussed below. Although the last mark, apostolicity, is discussed in a separate handout (see *The Church is Apostolic*), it must be understood that it is the *sure foundation* of the Church which ensures her unity, holiness, and catholicity; it is the mark that links them all. The Church is one, holy, and catholic *because she is founded by Jesus Christ on the apostles, and he supernaturally guarantees that the apostolic ministry will perpetually continue in her bishops.*

The name "Church" is a derivative of the Greek *Kyriake*, meaning "what belongs to the Lord." The Church is the moon to the sun of Christ; she reflects his brilliance but does not create it. For this reason, when we profess our faith in the marks of the Church, we are not professing our faith in the Church herself, but in the Triune God who created, established, and continually sanctifies her.

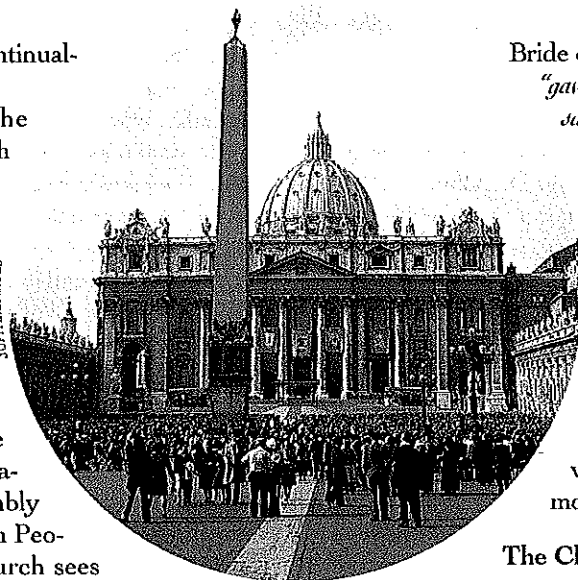
The relationship of the Church to God is so rich and so diverse that numerous symbolic images have been used in an effort to communicate this wonderful reality. The Greek word *ekklesia* (derived from "to call out of"), was the preferred word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to designate the assembly of the Israelites, the Chosen People, before God. The Church sees herself as the heir to that assembly, in the threefold sense of the

liturgical assembly, convened to pray and worship; the local community of believers; and the universal Church that is the People of God gathering in the entire world. In all these senses, she is the Body of Christ (see Col 1:18).

St. Peter and his successors were commissioned by Christ with the task of feeding and tending his sheep (see Jn 21:15-17). Jesus himself is the door to the sheepfold (see Jn 10:7), and the Church is his sheepfold. The Church, in another image, is a cultivated field, specifically a vineyard (see Mt 21:33-43) of which Jesus is the true vine and we the faithful are the branches who bear fruit if we abide in him (see Jn 15:1-8). The Church is also symbolized as a building: the house of God (see Heb 10:21), the household of God (see 1 Tm 3:15), the dwelling-place of God among us (see Rv 21:3), the holy temple (see Eph 2:21), and the new Jerusalem (see beginning verses above). The faithful are the living stones of this building (see 1 Pt 2:5).

Finally, and most beautifully, the Church is the Bride of Christ whom he loved and "gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor; without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27). This is the glorious Bride of the book of Revelation, the Bride of the Lamb (see, for example, Rv 19:7; beginning verses above), and she is our mother (see Gal 4:26).

"While unity subsists in the Catholic Church, this unity has been profoundly wounded."



The largest church in the world, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, constructed from 1506 to 1615

The Church is One

The Church is one because of Christ. He founded his Church

on St. Peter (see Mt 16:18) and the rest of the apostles and ensured that through them and their successors gathered around the successor of St. Peter, the Gospel would continue to be preached and his Kingdom would spread throughout the whole world. The one Church continues his saving presence on earth and unites the People of God in *"love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony"* (Col 3:14). Although charity is the most important sign of the Church's unity, there are also three other visible bonds of her communion: 1) the profession of the one faith received from the apostles; 2) the common celebration of the sacraments; and 3) the apostolic succession which ensures that the authority of our present pope and bishops is the same as that received by the apostles from Christ.

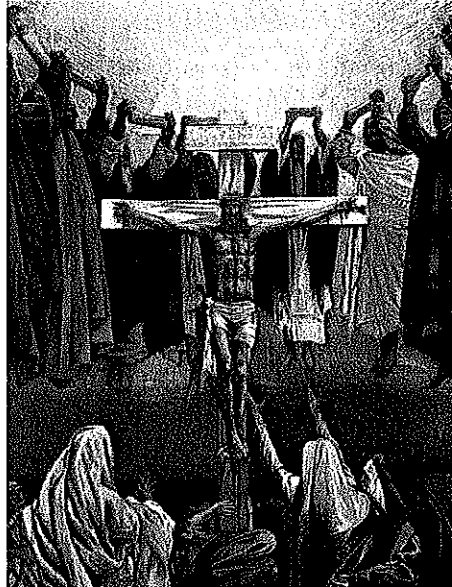
We cannot fail to recognize that, while unity subsists in the Catholic Church, this unity has been profoundly wounded by divisions caused at least in part by the sins and pride of her own sons and daughters. The Church prays constantly for Christian unity in its work of ecumenism and strives to heal these wounds and reunite all Christians into the one Church of Christ.

The Church is Holy

Jesus taught us to *"be perfect as [our] Heavenly Father is perfect"* (Mt 5:48) and so the Church offers to its members every spiritual gift and grace toward this end of perfection and sanctity. Viewed from above, the Church is that divine institution created by the Father, established by the Son, and animated by the Holy Spirit. She is the Bride of Christ and the new Jerusalem shown to St. John in his Heavenly vision: *"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Rv 21:2). Viewed from here below, the holiness of the Church is imperfect. As the Kingdom of God on earth, the Church is made up of saints *on the way* who have not yet attained the perfection which awaits them in Heaven.

This of course does not fully explain the weak-

"The Church is meant to draw people from every corner of the world into her fold."



It is Finished, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

nesses and moral failings of some of her children in past and present centuries. For that, our Lord offers the parable of the wheat and the weeds (see Mt 13:24-30, 36-43). Like the master of the field who allows the weeds to grow up with the wheat until harvest lest in uprooting them the wheat is destroyed, the Church is patient with all her children and holds out to them, even the most hardened sinners, the mercy and love of God. When Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, only then will he *"gather out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire"* (Mt 13:41-42). It should also be noted that, during the Church's more difficult times, the Lord has been gracious in sending her great models of sanctity and charity.

The Church is Catholic

The word "catholic" means universal, which is applied to the Church in two ways. First, the Church is catholic in the sense of being "whole" or "total" because in her, according to the merits of Christ, subsists the fullness of Revelation and means of universal salvation. Only the Church has the fullness of the deposit of faith because only she is linked to the apostles who were entrusted with it and given the great commission from the Lord: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28:19-20).

Second, the Church is catholic in the sense of "universal" because she is meant to draw people from every corner of the world into her fold. Thus, evangelization is both a sign and a requirement of the Church's catholicity. God desires all people to be drawn into the Church and form the one People of God as one family. Her missionary effort respects cultural differences from around the world when they do not conflict with Gospel values, and the Church herself is made more beautiful by the diversity of gifts poured out by the Holy Spirit and by the diversity of cultures in which she finds herself.

(CCC 748-757, 811-856)

Servant of the Servants of God: St. Peter and His Successors in the Life of the Church

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me. ~ Luke 22:31-34

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ~ Matthew 16:13-16

Simon's Confession of Faith

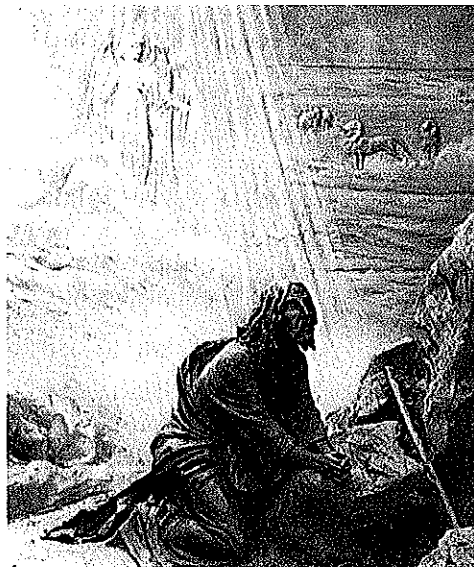
SIMON'S CONFESSION OF FAITH is essential to understanding his unique role in the Church. It was because of this confession that he was given the name Peter and entrusted with the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona!" Jesus declared, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Mt 16:17-19).

Peter was "blessed" be-

cause the Father revealed to him the truth about his Son (see Mt 11:27). This truth was *foundational* and *definitive*. The faith of the whole Church depended upon and was grounded in it. Initially, and according to God's plan, it was given only to Peter. Through the Holy Spirit, he was able to profess it openly before his brother apostles. In turn, they too were blessed and given the grace to see the Lord for who he was. Thus, on the rock of Peter's faith, the apostles entered into *communion* around the only one who had the power to unite them, namely Jesus Christ. He is the Promised One, the Messiah — truly, the Son of the Living God.

"Peter is the Rock"

Because of his profession of faith in Christ, Simon was given a new name. In the



Jesus is ministered to by angels, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

"The Lord Jesus personally and permanently established apostolic authority."

"The pope is more of a father than he is anything else."

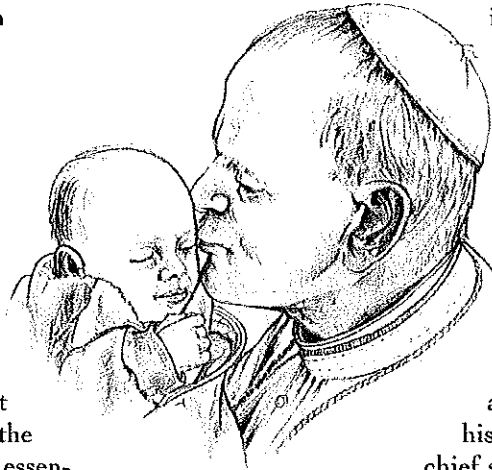
Greek New Testament, this name is rendered "Kephas" (from Aramaic) or "Petros" (from Greek), both of which mean "rock." Jesus called Simon "rock" because he intended to build his Church on Simon's faith — a faith given him directly from the Father (see Mt 16:17). Ultimately and without a doubt, Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the Church (see Ps 118:22; Mt 21:42; Acts 4:10-11; Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pt 2:4-8), but he chose to build the Church on the person of Peter, whose faith was essential to God's plan.

Apostolic Authority and Succession

The role of Peter cannot be discussed without some mention of apostolic authority and succession. It is clear from Sacred Scripture that Jesus entrusted his own mission to the care of all the apostles (see Jn 13:20; Jn 17:18; Jn 20:21). He gave them authority to teach and to heal (see Mt 10:1; Mt 28:20; Lk 9:1). Furthermore, he promised to be with them until the end of time (Mt 28:20) and to send the Holy Spirit to guide them "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). Hence, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus personally and permanently established apostolic authority (see 1 Cor 12:27-31; Ti 2:15). He did this in order to keep the Church united in truth and charity until "the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

It is also clear from Scripture that the mission Jesus entrusted to the apostles was destined to last until the world's end. Therefore, they passed on their unique role and authority to their closest collaborators. They accomplished this by means of the "laying on of hands" (see Acts 6:5-6; 1 Tm 5:22; 2 Tm 1:6). Today this is called ordination, that is, admission to the sacrament of Holy Orders. It signifies and brings about "apostolic succession," the fullness of which resides in the bishops, but is shared by priests and deacons.

By the will and grace of God, apostolic authority has been preserved through an unbroken line. From the time of Peter to the present day, this authority has resided in the apostles and in their successors.



Drawing of Pope John Paul II kissing an infant, by Paul Kerria

It is an authority to lead and govern. More importantly, it is an authority to teach in the name and the person of Christ and to sanctify. It is an authority given by Christ Jesus himself so that all in the apostles' care may live in the assurance of truth and achieve holiness and salvation.

The Primacy

Regarding Peter specifically, those who succeed him as Bishop of Rome also inherit his unique role and authority as chief shepherd and teacher. This is expressed by the word "primacy." It simply means that Peter and his successors enjoy the first place among the college of bishops.

Primacy has very important implications. It is tightly bound to the events that unfolded at Caesarea Philippi. Remember that the Father first revealed the whole truth about Jesus to Peter alone (see Mt 16:15-17) and, on the basis of this Revelation, Jesus entrusted Peter with the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (see Mt 16:19). It was God, therefore, who founded the authority of all the apostles on Peter. This meant that their authority was legitimate only insofar as they remained in communion with Peter's profession of faith revealed directly by the Father himself. This is so significant that today, as then, Peter and his successors remain the perpetual source and visible sign of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole Church.

"Holy Father"

The word "pope" comes from the Latin word *papa*, which means "father." The word "papacy," which refers to the pope's office as such, much like the word "presidency" refers to the office of the president, comes from the same root. The roots of these words are important because they reveal a central truth. The pope and the papacy acquire their deepest meaning and expression only within the context of a faith handed on to others in the true spirit of fatherhood. This fatherhood manifests itself best in an authentic witness to Jesus Christ before the world, faith-

ful even unto the shedding of blood. So the pope is more of a father than he is anything else. In his role as universal shepherd, he is charged by Christ with the task of feeding, guiding, teaching, and defending the People of God (see Lk 22:31-32; Jn 21:15-17). Catholics, then, are not afraid to call him "father," or even "Holy Father" because by virtue of his office, that is precisely who he is. His office is sacred (holy) and his role is paternal (fatherly).

The Pope is Human

At the same time, Catholics are equally unafraid to acknowledge that the pope is a human being. He is imperfect. Peter, too, was human and imperfect, possessing all the strengths and weaknesses of human existence. Jesus prays for Peter "that [his] faith may not fail" (Lk 22:32), because he knows the depths of human weakness. Jesus knows that Peter will deny him; it is not a question of "if" (see Mk 14:30-31, 66-72).

In spite of Peter's denial, Jesus does not reject him (see Jn 21:15-17). While fully aware of human weakness, he is equally aware of the concrete possibilities of this man. He continued to value Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi and led him patiently through his Passion and death and beyond his denial. This valuing of Peter's profession of faith ultimately extends to his successors. They must also face human failings while continuing to proclaim the truth about Jesus to the Church and to the whole human family.

All of this is central, because it is not simply a question of the man Peter or the one who succeeds him. Chiefly, it is a question of the will of the Father (see Mt 16:17) and the work of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:4, 14). It is a question of Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone and the one who builds his Church on Peter and all the apostles.

The Pope: A Work of the Holy Spirit

Following the Resurrection, and despite Peter's denial, Jesus confirms Peter's primacy over the

whole Church, asking him "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:15). Peter, who had not stopped loving Jesus, responds: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you" (Jn 21:16). "Feed my lambs ... Tend my sheep," the Lord commands him (Jn 21:15-16).

In this light, we see that for Jesus, Peter's primacy is not a question of his human strengths or weaknesses. Peter does not repeat what he stated before the Crucifixion: "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you" (Mt 26:35). It is not a question of that. By then, it had become a question of the Spirit of God, promised by Christ to the one who would take his place on earth. Despite his imperfection, Peter was chosen to stand in for Christ. His election became a question of the *concrete possibilities* of humanity redeemed in Christ.

In this regard, perhaps it is enough to remember that on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who first spoke to those gathered in Jerusalem. Peter reminded them of the crime committed against Jesus (see Acts 2:14-41). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus could be confident in Peter's witness to the truth. He could, as it were, rely on Peter as his vicar on earth and on all the apostles — even on Paul, who at that time continued to persecute the Church and hated the name of Jesus. This trust and confidence on the part of Jesus continues to bear witness to the charism of infallibility possessed by the pope and the bishops in communion with him.

Servant of the Servants of God

To conclude, it is important to see the pope's role and presence in the Church as a necessary and fundamental *service* to the whole Body of Christ. In fact, without this *primary service of obedience to the truth*, the Church's unity — so integral to the Church — could not be guaranteed. Therefore, the pope is also called "Servant of the Servants of God." His role is ministry (service), to be carried out in the name of and in the person of Christ for the good of all.

(CCC 85, 551-553, 861-862, 874-896, 1559, 2034)

"For Jesus, Peter's primacy is not a question of his human strengths or weaknesses."



Pope St. Pius X, the first 20th century pope to be declared a saint

Mystical Body of Christ

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ~ Romans 12:4-5

GOD'S people are not only a people called

"We refer to the Church in its relationship to Christ as the Mystical Body."

together by Christ but also are united in Christ. This unity in Christ establishes both a bond among the People of God with each other, as members are united in a physical body and with Christ as "the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18), as a physical body is united to its head. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, Christ mystically unites each member to himself, enabling each to proclaim this mysterious reality: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). We refer to the Church in its relationship to Christ as the Mystical Body: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). We are united to Christ especially in our Baptism when we are buried into his death and share in the glory of his Resurrection (see Rom 6:4), and in the Eucharist, when Jesus sacramentally abides in us, and we in him (see Jn 6:56).

In a mysterious way, Christ and his Church together make up a single unity, the "whole Christ." Because of the union in Christ of the People of God, the sufferings and joys of each member of the Church affect the whole Mystical Body: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26). We share, too, in the sufferings of the Head "in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17). And yet the Church is also seen in the intimate union with Christ that is symbolized by the Bridegroom caring for the Bride as for his own body (see Eph 5:25-30).

The Holy Spirit, working through the Body, produces in us good works, growth in virtue, and ho-

liness of life, in a shared journey toward salvation. Individual gifts (also called "charisms") are diversified among the members of the Church, who nevertheless are equal in the dignity of their Baptism, united in charity, and serve to build up the entire Mystical Body: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom 12:6-8). Each member is to accept and

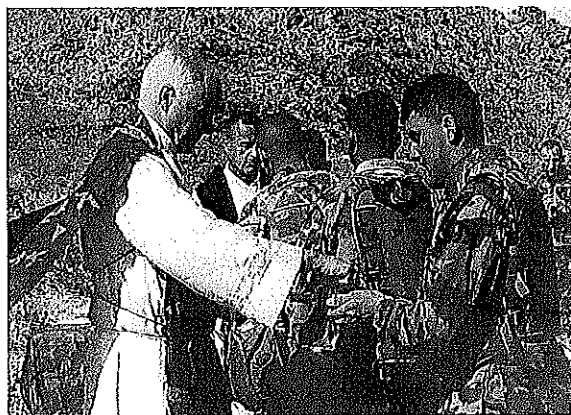
use his or her gift not with pride but with gratitude, submitting to the Church in humility so as to pursue the common good and not individual power, recognition, or glory.

While all share the same call to holiness, the way this call is lived out is different according to one's personal vocation or state in life. Some are called to follow Christ in marriage, others in the single life, and still oth-

ers as "eunuchs [that is, virgins] ... for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 19:12). Whether as priests, as those in the consecrated life as religious brothers and sisters (nuns), as husbands and wives, or as single persons, all members of the Mystical Body are necessary for the life of the Church and are bound together by the Spirit so "that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (1 Cor 12:25). For "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ... it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (1 Cor 12:4-6) for the good of the whole Body, the Church.

(CCC 787-801, 872)

COURTESY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA



Reception of Holy Communion by a soldier from Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA