

# **The Four Marks of the Church**



# The Four Marks of the Church

## The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic

“We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”<sup>1</sup> We believe that the Church is something more than meets the eye. There is something supernatural about the Church or otherwise it wouldn't be in the Apostles' Creed (2<sup>nd</sup> century).

It's something that can only be properly and adequately understood when it is understood through the eyes of faith and not just simply through the five senses and human reason.

### What is the Church?

**Eph 1:22-23** And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him [Jesus] as **head** over all things to **the church**, which is his **body**, the fullness of the one who fills all things . . .

**1Cor 12:12-13** 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. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. . .

#### Some Characteristics of the Hierarchical Church:

• Founded by Christ on Peter ( <i>Mt 16:16</i> )	• The final authority ( <i>Mt 18:18</i> )
• Guided by the Holy Spirit ( <i>Jn 16:13</i> )	• Has Apostles ( <i>Acts 1:20, 1 Cor 12:28</i> )
• Pillar and foundation of truth ( <i>1 Tim 3:15</i> )	• Infallible-faith & morals ( <i>Mt 16:18</i> )

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### The Church is One

- Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou has given me, that they may be **one** as we also are one". (*Jn 17:11, 21*)
- The Church is the family of God. God raises us up and makes us children of God (*1 Jn 3:1*). We are united as children of God through Christ and He elevates us to participate with Him (*Participatory Theonomy – opposed to autonomy, hegemony*).
  - **Col 1:24** Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking‡ in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the Church

<sup>1</sup> *The Apostle's Creed*

‡ 1:24, *what is lacking*: Christ's sufferings were, of course, sufficient for our redemption, but all of us may join our suffering to his, in order that the fruits of his redemption be applied to the souls of men.

- Adam’s sin tore apart and dis-unified the family of God. God comes down at key moments in salvation history to **reunify** His people, to maintain family **oneness**. Christ restored the unity of the Church supernaturally through baptism.
  - "For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body** -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. " (*1 Cor 12:13*)
- The Eucharist is a sign of that unity.
  - “The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are **one bread, one body**: for we all partake of the **one bread**. (*1 Cor 10:16-17*)
- Unity of doctrine. Well defined and documented (e.g. encyclicals, Catechism, etc.)
  - *Acts 4:32* “One heart and soul”
  - *1 Cor 1:10* “all agree . . . no dissensions, united in the same mind”
  - *Phil 1:27* “firm in one spirit with one mind”
  - *Jn 17:21-23* “that they may be perfectly one”
- Diversity in cultures, ministries, vocations and liturgical expressions don’t alter her unity.

### That Unity is Hierarchical

*Eph 4:11-13* And his gifts were that some should be **apostles**, some **prophets**, some **evangelists**, some **pastors** and **teachers**, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (*the Church*), until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

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### The Church is Holy

- The Church as the “body” of Christ, has a physical and spiritual aspect like the human body. So the “soul” of the Church, itself, is perfectly holy, but its members are sinners and her holiness is incomplete and needs to be perfected still.
- The Church’s holiness comes from our founder, Jesus Christ: He is holy as God is holy. He sanctifies (makes holy) the Church (*Eph 5:26*)
- We are members of the Church and called to be holy (*Mt 5:48*), yet our “membership” is provisional in a sense. We must “abide in Christ” while in this world. (*Jn 15:4*)
- The saints in heaven are perfected – there, the Church is holy!
- The Church is not a political or a military kingdom. We are "a kingdom of priests", we're "a royal priesthood", a "holy nation". (*1 Pt:2:9*) We are “set apart.”
- The Church is able to make her members holy. She gives us the 7 Sacraments and all the graced merited by Jesus, especially in the Eucharist.
- The holiness of God is manifested through the holy Saints of the Church, and especially by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## The Church is Catholic

- The word “catholic” (*katholikos* in Greek) means “embracing or pertaining to the whole” or *universal*.
- Christ commissioned his apostles to make disciples of all nations (*Mt 28:19*)
- No Church on earth claims what the Roman Catholic Church claims for herself.
  - That she is the Church founded by Jesus, 2000 years ago
  - That she teaches infallibly on matter of faith and morals
  - That she has apostles to this day (successors to the Apostles are the bishops)
  - That she traces her popes back to the Apostle Peter in an unbroken succession.
- The word “catholic” was first recorded in 107 AD by Ignatius of Antioch and was commonplace by 140 AD.

“See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery (office of priest) as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is administered either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there, let the multitude of the people also be; even as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, Chapter 8).

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- St. Augustine (~400 AD) says,

"The Church is hidden from no one for it is the Catholic Church itself which is therefore called *universal in Greek* because it is spread throughout the entire world. It is not allowed to anyone not to know this Church for which reason, according to the word of Jesus Christ, it is not possible that it be hidden . . . There are many other things which keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church -- the unanimity of peoples and nations keeps me here, her authority, inaugurated in miracles, nourished by hope, augmented by love and confirmed by her age, keeps me here. The succession of priests from the very seat of the Apostle Peter up to the present episcopate (office of bishop) keeps me here and last, the very name of Catholic, which not without reason belongs to this Church alone in the face of so many heretics, so much so that although all heretics want to be called Catholic, when a stranger inquires where the Catholic Church meets, not one of the heretics would dare point out his own basilica or meeting place. *The name of the Catholic Church is peculiar to the true Church.*"<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine)
- The Church is universal because we are one bread and one body in the Eucharist. (*1 Cor 10:17*)
- Gentiles (the non-Jews) are now co-heirs and members of the body of Christ (*Eph 3:6*)
- Testimony of Historians to the Catholic Church

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine of Hippo. (1887). [Against the Epistle of Manichæus Called Fundamental](#). In P. Schaff (Ed.), R. Stothert (Trans.), *St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists* (Vol. 4, p. 130, Ch 4, art 5). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

Lord Macaulay, a great British historian, a non-Catholic says this: "There is not and there never was on this earth a work of human policy so well-deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together with the two great ages of human civilization. The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday when compared with the line of the supreme pontiffs, the Popes; the line we trace back in an unbroken series from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the 8<sup>th</sup> and far beyond the time of Pepin, the august dynasty extends. The republic of Venice is gone and the papacy remains. The papacy remains not in decay, not a mere antique but full of life and youthful vigor. The Catholic Church is still *sending forth to the farthest ends of the earth world missionaries* as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustine and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila the Hun. Nor do we see any sign, which indicates that the term of her long dominion is approaching. She saw the commencement of all ecclesiastical establishments (churches) that now exist in the world and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all."<sup>3</sup>

- We are the family of God and because God is the Father of the whole human race, God's intention is to restore the unity *throughout the whole world*, no matter what race or country we belong to. He wishes "all to be saved." (*1 Tim 2:4*)

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## The Church is Apostolic

- *St. Clement of Rome*, writing about 97 A.D., gives us a statement that sums up the message of apostolic succession. "Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be dissension over the title of Bishop. In their knowledge of this, therefore, they proceeded to appoint the ministers I spoke of and they went on to add an instruction that, if these should fall asleep, other accredited persons should *succeed them in their office*." (emphasis mine)
- The keys given to Peter signified succession. (*Mt 16:19*) See also *Is 22:20 ff*.
- Christ chose 12 Apostles. They in turn appointed others. (*Acts 1:20-26*) (*2 Tim 1:6 – laying on of hands*)
  - "His office let another take" *Acts 1:20* The word "office" is "*episkopen*" which means "over seer." The office of Catholic bishops is called the episcopate.
  - "What you [Timothy] have heard from me [Paul] entrust to faithful men who will teach others also." *2 Tim 2:2 – 4* generations of succession.
- They have the authority of Christ. (*Jn 20:21 ff, Mt 28:18 ff*)
- Paul says in *Ephesians 2:19-20*, that the family of God is built upon the foundation of the Apostles. In the Church, God has appointed first, **apostles** . . . (*1 Cor 12:28*). If the Church exists today, then there must be apostles.
- St. Irenaeus in 150 AD said,

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<sup>3</sup> Macaulay, Thomas Babington, *Critical and Historical Essays*, 1843. "Foreign History" section of Volume II Essay on Ranke's *History of the Pope's* in the 1840 *Edinburgh Review*

"Anyone who wishes to discern the truth may see in every Church in the whole world the Apostolic succession clear and manifest. We can enumerate those who were appointed Bishops in the churches by the Apostles and their successors to our very day, but as it would be very long in a book of this kind to enumerate the successors of all the churches, I will point out the Apostolic tradition in faith announced to mankind, which has been brought down to our time by the succession of Bishops in the greatest, in the most ancient and well-known church, founded and established by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, at Rome. We can confound all who in any way either for self-pleasing or vainglory or for blindness or perversity gather more than they ought. For to this church, that is the church of Rome, established by Peter, on account of her more powerful principality, it is necessary that every church should come together; that is, the faithful from all sides in which always that which is the tradition from the Apostles has been preserved by those who are from all parts."<sup>4</sup>

- St Irenaeus then enumerates all the Popes starting with Peter (12 in all after Peter) until his time. [Interesting note: All of the first 39 Popes were martyred.]
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<sup>4</sup> St. Irenaeus, "*Against Heresies*," Book III, 3.