

A Mission Church

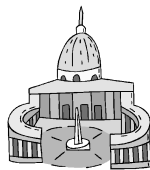
The Church: What Is It?

Since "Church" is identified in many ways, many people find it difficult to understand, and sometimes equally difficult to accept. Jack Patnik is a Adult Faith Formation Catechist of our parish. His approach to this subject comes from one who asked the same questions as you and I concerning Church.

In PART I, he identified the Church as The Body of Christ, The Bride of Christ, and as The New Jerusalem, God's Kingdom.

Don't get overwhelmed with the references to scripture. They are presented to provide validity to what we as Catholics believe, indicated in Jack's writing by CCC (Catechism of the Catholic Church). A suggestion (good for any of these Mission Church inserts) is to read it at least twice. Enjoy.

Before examining the ramifications to the Church being the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the Kingdom of God, let's look at how we got Church.



PART II
And we're not talking about the church as a building.

The Church Created

If we read Matt 16:13-19 we see that Jesus tells his disciples that He will build (future tense) His Church on Peter. As long as Jesus is with the disciples there is no need for Church. Church is needed to "take Jesus' place on earth" once Jesus ascends to Heaven. That in itself speaks volumes about the Church. We see in scripture that the Church was one "conceived" on Holy Thursday when Jesus instituted the priesthood and the Eucharist - the two elements that make the Church the Church. (For a different discussion - the Eucharist is the source and the summit of Christianity (JPII) and the Eucharist comes to us only through the ordained priesthood). We see also in scripture that the Church was born on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Blessed Mother and the Apostles and emboldened them to "go ... make disciples of all nations ... baptizing ...teaching" (Matt 28:16-20).

When Jesus announced that He would build His Church He stated three truths that we might struggle to accept.

(1) The Church will be built on Peter - the rock: so the Church has a human foundation and it isn't you or

me but rather Peter and his successors.

(2) The gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church - Satan cannot corrupt the Church - the Church shall always be right in faith and morals.

(3) The Church is given the power to forgive or not forgive sin and that power is recognized and consented to in Heaven. That's a whole lot of power.

The Creeds tell us the four marks of the Church.

[1]. **One** (CCC 813-822)

See John 17: 20-21. Jesus prays for unity.

He founded one Church and wants that Church (His body with its many members) to be one as He and the Father (and Spirit) are one. The Church is Christ's body (singular). How many bodies does He have? The Church is the bride of Christ (singular). How many brides does Christ have? The Church is God's kingdom (singular). How many kingdoms does He have? Does the current state of Christianity reflect that oneness that Jesus prayed for?

[2]. **Holy** (CCC 823-829)

See Matt 5: 48 (we are to be perfect as the Father is perfect) in addition to Matt 16:18 (the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church). Is not Christ's body holy? Is not Christ's bride pure? Is not the kingdom of God holy?

[3]. **Catholic** (CCC 830-856)

We often forget that the word catholic means universal (going well beyond worldwide). So the Church could have been called the Universal Church rather than the Catholic Church. No matter what it's called, Jesus wanted all nations to be made disciples (Matt 28:19).

[4]. **Apostolic** (CCC 857-865)

How are all nations to be made disciples? Well, there needs to be baptizing and teaching (Matt 28:19-20). And is a nation of disciples a disciple nation if 51% percent of the people are disciples? Not only no, but heck no. Our God is a jealous God. He wants all of the individual and all the individuals. He wants all of all of us. Who says we're not a mission Church? They would be wrong. Baptism and teaching are needed in China, Plum and Penn Hills. Paraphrasing Sean Connery in "The Untouchables", "What are we prepared to do about it?"

How do we tie up the loose ends from above? We need to

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go back to the garden and Gen 3:5, which I personally think is the key to understanding our life on earth. Satan tempts us continually telling us we “will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad”, and appealing to our desire to be God, who decides what is good (what we like) and what is bad (what we don’t like) i.e., making the “rules”.

There is only one God. He made the rules and gave them to us in the Ten Commandments. We struggle to bring our lives in alignment with His commandments, so He helps us. He gave us Jesus to show us how to live and to break the chains that bind us to sin. Jesus gave us His Church to “be” Him for us. The Church speaks for God. When I think differently than the Church, am I humble and faithful enough to accept that in speaking for God the Church is right and I am wrong? (This is not the case when the Church is in need of reform - I just best make sure that reform is

called for and God is calling me to be the reformer). When I sin, do I realize that I also sin against His body, the Church, His beloved bride? Can I humble myself to ask for the forgiveness of the Church that Jesus empowered it to give? If the Church doesn’t forgive (because I couldn’t be bothered with the sacrament of reconciliation) the sin remains bound on earth and so also in Heaven. Pretty serious stuff, that sin.

As a sinful human being raised in the environment of rugged American individualism, I struggle letting anyone tell me what to do. I struggle to listen to God. So it’s even more of a struggle listening to this mystical thing called Church, that is made up of a bunch of sinful, sometimes hypocritical people. How dare the Church tell me what to do? It dares because that’s the job Jesus gave it to do. Maybe I ought to shut up long enough to listen.

