

" I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH "

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"To believe that the Church is "holy" and "catholic," and that she is "one" and "apostolic" (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (CCC 750) This powerful statement from the Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights the importance of our belief in the Church. This should lead us to ask three basic questions: Who or what do we mean by "Catholic Church", what does it mean to believe in the Church, and why is this so important? First of all, the word "church" itself means a convocation or an assembly. What then would identify this assembly as the Catholic Church? In instituting the Church, Jesus himself identifies it with Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church". (Matt 16:18) This tells us it must be "apostolic" in nature. We should be able to trace it back to the apostles themselves, with Peter as its head. Scripture also identifies the Church as Christ's body (Eph 1:22), and as a holy temple, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" with Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (Eph 2:20) As members of this "household of God", we are being built into a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit". (Eph 2:22) From these passages, and

others, we come to understand the Church as an assembly of believers united and centered in Christ, under the leadership of apostles appointed by Him. Peter and the apostles were given the authority to "bind and loose" (Matt 16:19) and they used that authority to not only teach and spread the gospel, but also to pass on that power to others who would succeed them. These successors are the Bishops and Popes, who over the centuries, would comprise the "magisterium" (Latin for "teaching office") of the Church. This "apostolic succession" once again identifies Christ's Church. This also helps us to understand what it means to "believe" in the Church. We are believing in Christ as the head of his Church through the authority of the magisterium, the Bishops in communion with the Pope. This Church, as Paul's first letter to Timothy tells us, is the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). This is how we come to know Jesus, who is "the way, and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) To believe in the Catholic Church means we acknowledge this, and trust the authority of the Church to lead us and guide us to Christ. In a recent letter to a prominent politician, Bishop Thomas Tobin writes; "being a Catholic means that you're part of a faith community that possesses a clearly defined authority and doctrine, obligations and expectations. It means that you believe and accept the teachings of the Church, especially on essential

matters of faith and morals; that you belong to a local Catholic community, a parish; that you attend Mass on Sundays and receive the sacraments regularly; that you support the Church, personally, publicly, spiritually and financially." This statement really gives us a practical application of what it means to believe in the Catholic Church. And finally, why is this important? Simply put, without the Church, we would not know Christ. We could not encounter him outside of his own mystical body, which Sacred Scripture specifically tells us is his Church. Without the Church, we would not be able to receive his forgiveness and his life in the sacraments. We would not have the Sacred Scriptures, as we know them, and we would have no sound moral teaching on which to base our life decisions. Christ instituted the Church for very important reasons. His life flows to us through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, which are given to us through the Church. We are united with Him and one another in His Body, and we are guided on the path that leads us to eternal life in heaven. What could be more important?

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." (1 Tim 3:14-15)

"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but 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." (Eph 2:19-22)

"...as Christ loved the church 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)

"...which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens... And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the

church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way." (Eph 1:20-23)

"Jesus said to him in reply, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'" (Matt 16:17-19)

SACRED TRADITION

"Christians of the first centuries said, 'The world was created for the sake of the Church.' God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the "convocation" of men in Christ, and this "convocation" is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things..." (CCC 760)

"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.'" (Clement of Alexandria)

"The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures.' To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church 'is

the Reign of Christ already Present in mystery.'" (CCC 763)

"The Church . . . will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven," at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day, "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations." (CCC 769)

"The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men." (CCC 771)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

- **Am I growing in my understanding of what it means to believe in the Holy Catholic Church?**
- **How do I show my belief in the Church in my daily life?**
- **Where do I look for guidance on issues of faith and morals?**