

"IN COMMUNION WITH THE CHURCH "

Jerry Johnson

In the December 2009 issue, we explored the Holy, Catholic Church and what it means to belong to the Church. In describing the Church as the "Body of Christ", however, we must also consider the different types of communion with the Catholic Church that those who are in the body may have an experience of. In the December issue, we were speaking primarily of those who are in "full communion" with the Catholic Church and their role and responsibilities of that full communion. But are there others who are outside of this full communion with the Church, but still members of the Body of Christ? Certainly, there are. It is by faith in Jesus and a valid baptism, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we are first incorporated into the Body of Christ. The Church recognizes the baptisms performed by all truly Christian communities. We identify these Christian communities first and foremost, by their belief in the central mystery of the Church; the mystery of the Trinity, three Persons in one God. The belief in the divine and human natures of Christ would flow from this central mystery, as would other basic creedal beliefs. Familiar organizations who would not espouse this Trinitarian belief would be the Jehovah Witnesses and

the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) among others.

But the Church's acceptance of Christian baptisms which take place outside the confines of the Catholic Church leads us to ask the next question. How do we describe the relationship of those Christians to the one, holy Catholic Church? After all, Christ's body cannot be divided. There is only one Body of Christ. And if we describe the Church as the "Body of Christ" then there must be only one Church, as we profess. The Catechism explains the relationship of individual members of the Body of Christ to the Catholic Church in paragraph 838: "The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. Those 'who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church'..." In other words, all truly baptized Christians are members of the Body of Christ, which brings them into some form of communion with the Catholic Church. Those who are not in "full communion" may not realize or even accept this reality. The "imperfect communion" with the Church that the Catechism describes, however, is the reason that members of other communities are not able to avail themselves of the "fullness of the means of salvation", which is found in the Catholic Church. (CCC 824)

This is unfortunately evident when those not in full communion with the Church are present at Mass and unable to partake of the Holy Eucharist. The Church does, however, recognize the sanctity of those members of the Body who are not in full communion, as well as the means of salvation which are found within their particular communities. In the words of the Catechism, paragraph 819: "Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements. Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him, and are in themselves calls to 'Catholic unity.'" As we recognize the holiness of our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is this Catholic unity which we must continually strive for, without diminishing or denying the doctrines of the One, Holy Catholic Church. This is true ecumenism and this is our prayer!

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:20-21)

"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)

"...and he has put all things under his (Jesus') feet and has made him the head over all things for

the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

(Eph 1:22-23)

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Eph 4:4-6)

SACRED TRADITION

"Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body, become intimately united with him: "In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his Passion and glorification. This is especially true of Baptism, which unites us to Christ's death and Resurrection..." (CCC 790)

"...Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'" (CCC 791)

"The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him." (CCC 816)

" . . . All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church." (CCC 818)

"The Church is one: she acknowledges one Lord, confesses one faith, is born of one Baptism, forms only one Body, is given life by the one Spirit, for the sake of one hope (cf. Eph 4:3-5), at whose fulfillment all divisions will be overcome." (CCC 866)

"Concern for achieving unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. But we must realize that this holy objective - the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ - transcends human powers and gifts. That is why we place all our hope in the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit." (CCC 822)