

# **The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults**

*by Fr. Antony*

## **The Church**

The word “Church” (Latin *ecclesia*) means convocation, or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose. The word *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all, for their assembly on Mount Sinai. It was there that Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself “Church,” the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is “calling together” his people from all the ends of the earth. **(CCC 751)**

In Christian usage, the word “church” means the liturgical assembly, but it also designates the local community, or the whole universal community of believers. According to the church teaching, she exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so she becomes Christ’s Body.

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH**

It first originated in the heart of God the Father, and it originally is His plan. The remote preparation begins with Abraham’s call and God’s promise and the covenant with the “chosen people”. But they (Israel) broke the covenant and through the prophets God announced a new and eternal covenant. “Christ instituted this New Covenant.”

It was the Son’s task to accomplish the Father’s plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent. The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News. The Church “is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery” **(CCC 763)**. Jesus’ choice of the Twelve with Peter as the head, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, gave a permanent structure to his community and that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved.

By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church. The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. “The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus.” “For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross, that there came forth the ‘wondrous sacrament of the whole Church’” **(CCC 764)**. As the Son accomplished his work on Earth, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the church.

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH**

The Church is a mystery because, though it is in history, it is also a spiritual reality. It is only “with the eyes of faith” that one can see it. The Church is essentially human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities. The Church is at the same time, a

“society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ; the visible society and the spiritual community; the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches”. (CCC-770-71)

### **CHURCH THE UNIVERSAL SACRAMENT OF SALVATION**

“The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.” The Church’s first purpose is to be the sacrament of the inner union of men with God. Because men’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race.