

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

by Fr. Antony

The Church – Part 2

In the Creed, we profess that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These four characteristics indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. It is not that she owns these by herself but it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who makes it one, holy catholic and apostolic. Though there are historical manifestations, only through faith we can recognize this.

THE CHURCH IS ONE

The Church is one because of her source: “The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”²⁵⁹ The Church is one because of her founder: for “the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, . . . restoring the unity of all in one people and one body (CCC-813). Holy Spirit, who dwells in the church, is the unifying factor in the church. In this unity we can also find diversity, because of the variety of God’s gifts, and the diversity of those who receive them. We maintain unity by professing one faith, common celebration of divine worship (sacraments) and apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders. But, we find down through the centuries, that serious dissensions appeared, and large communities became separated from the full communion.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

“The Church. . . is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy,’ loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body, and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.” The Church, then, is “the holy People of God,” and her members are called “saints.” It is in the Church that “the fullness of the means of salvation” has been deposited. It is in her that “by the grace of God we acquire holiness” (CCC-823-824).

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

The word “catholic” comes from the Greek word *Katholikos*, which was later Latinized into *Catholicus*. It means ‘Universal’, which in itself means, ‘of or relating to, or affecting the entire world and all peoples therein’. It was St. Ignatius of Antioch who used the word “catholic” for the first time in 107 A. D.

When we say the church is “catholic” it has double meaning: First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. “Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church.” In her subsists the fullness of Christ’s body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him “the fullness of the means of salvation” which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race (**Matthew 28:19-20**). All men are called to belong to the new People of God (**CCC- 830-831**). The church is missionary in its very nature, which is a requirement of the catholicity.

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways: (1) she was, and remains, built on “the foundation of the Apostles,” the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself; (2) with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps, and hands on, the teaching, the “good deposit,” the salutary words she has heard from the apostles and (3) she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ’s return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, “assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church’s supreme pastor”(CCC-857).