

RCIA CLASS 8A - THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

I. Jesus Christ established the Catholic Church during His time on earth, promising that she should last until the end of time. She was first made manifest at Pentecost, and has expanded to the ends of the world, united heaven and earth.

A. In the Old Covenant, God promised that there would be a new kingdom, which would extend to all of the world. See, e.g., Is. 2:2-4; Dan. 2:44-45; Micah 4:1-4.

1. In this new kingdom, all nations would be gathered together. See, e.g., Is. 66:28- 21; Jer. 3:17-18; Ps. 87:4-6.

2. This new and glorious kingdom would allow people to know God personally, a gift given only to the prophets, and in fact only at times even to them, in prior ages. See, e.g., Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 36:26-27; Joel 3:1-2.

3. The kingdom would be guided by one glorious king, but also have other shepherds he appoints. See, e.g., Ez. 37:23-28; Jer. 3:15;

B. During His earthly ministry, Jesus began to establish this kingdom by speaking of the Church that He would found.

1. Although the Gospels only describe two occasions where Jesus overtly used the term "church" those times make it clear that He intended the Church to make His presence known throughout time and space. See Matt. 16:18, 18:17.

2. Jesus plainly intended that His people should be united, that the Spirit would guide them and that He would be with them until the end of time. See, e.g., Matt. 28:20; John 14:15-20, 15:26-27; 16:12-15, 17:20-26.

3. Jesus specifically chose twelve Apostles, reflecting the twelve tribes of Israel. That is why Judas Iscariot had to be replaced, to make the number twelve again. See Acts 1:15-26.

- The idea is that God had made numerous promises to the ancient kingdom of Israel, that she would be a worldwide kingdom, bringing all peoples to worship God. See, e.g., Is. 2:2-4, 66:7-21; Jer. 31:31-34; Dan. 2:44-45; Mic. 1:1-4. The Church is this new Israel, God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. "Just as the people of Israel in the flesh, who wandered in the desert were already called the church [or assembly] of God, see Num. 20:4; Duet. 23:1ff., so too the New Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent, city,

see Heb. 13:14, is also called the church of Christ, see Matt. 16:18.)" Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium 9.

4. Jesus promised at the Last Supper to send the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles that they may continue His work. See John 14:16-17, 25-26, 15:26-27, 16:13-15. And, as recorded in John 17, He prayed that all of His people may be one.

3. Thus, as the Catechism says, "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 Scriptures." Catechism of the Catholic Church 763.

B. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made the Church visible before the world and sent the first Christians to bring the Gospel to all nations.

1. Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised again that the Holy Spirit would come upon His people and that He would be with them until the end of time. See Matt. 28:28; Acts 1:4-8; see Catechism 767-768.

2. At Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit occurred and the Church began to gather the nations before into the kingdom of God. As the Catechism says, "The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the dispensation of the mystery - the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates His work of salvation through the liturgy of His Church until He comes." Catechism 1076.

3. Acts of the Apostles then describes the early Church up to about 62 A.D. There is a progress from Jerusalem, through the nations of the Roman Empire and finally into Rome, where that book ends.

C. St. Paul would also repeatedly speak of the Church, especially as the Body of Christ, uniting all peoples together under Christ. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:1-16, 5:23-32; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15.

1. The letters of St. Paul, as well as the Book of Revelation, would also speak of specific churches in given areas that incorporate the universal church throughout time and space. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:13; Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14. Some references in the New Testament epistles could be to either the Church universal or an individual church. See, e.g., James 5:13; 1 John 6, 10.

2. As Pope Pius XII stated in his 1943 encyclical Mystici Corporis (The Mystical Body of Christ), the Church is not a mere organic body in which the individuals have no autonomy, nor a mere moral body (e.g., a body politic or a partnership) where the members are simply gathered for a common purpose. Rather, the Church is a mystical body, which combines the unity of an organic body, in which all members deeply affect each other, with the autonomy present for each person as a moral body has.
3. There is thus both one universal church and specific churches in every area throughout the world.

D. The Church lives, not only on this earth, but also in heaven and in purgatory.

1. As the letter to the Colossians says, Jesus reconciles all things to Himself in heaven and on earth, through the Church, of whom He is the firstborn. See Col. 1:15-20.
2. We call the Church in heaven the Church triumphant, and the saints of that church intercede for us from this place in heaven.

- The Book of Maccabees (which is not accepted as canonical by Protestants or Jews) records the prophet Jeremiah and the high priest Onias, both of whom were dead, praying for their people. 1 Macc. 15:11-12. In addition, the Book of Revelation records a vision of the martyrs now in heaven asking God when He will bring justice on earth. Rev. 6:9-11. The angels in heaven likewise offer the prayers of the faithful as incense to God. See Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4. The Letter to the Hebrews presents the great figures of old as a "cloud of witnesses" urging us onto victory. See Heb. 12:1

- Thus, the Church venerates the saints and angels in heaven and asks their prayers for us. "In the lives of these companions of ours in the human condition, who are more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ, see 2 Cor. 3:18, God shows, vividly, to humanity, His presence and His face. He speaks to us in them and offers us a sign of His kingdom, to which we are powerfully attracted, so great a cloud of witnesses are we given, see Heb. 12:1, and such an affirmation of the truth of the Gospel. . . It is most fitting, therefore, that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and sisters and outstanding benefactors, and that we give due thanks to God for them." Lumen Gentium 50.

- We venerate and call upon the Blessed Virgin Mary above all the angels and saints, as the Mother of Jesus and thus the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church. Jesus performed His first miracle at her request and, being a good son, would want His people to give her honor. See John 2:1-11. The Book of Revelation presents "the woman clothed with the sun" who bears the Son and who is the mother of all the faithful. See Rev. 12:1-8. We identify this woman with both Mary and the Church, of whom she is the Mother. "By her motherly love she cares for her Son's brothers and sisters who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties. . . . She shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the people of God." Lumen Gentium 62, 69.

3. The Church is also in purgatory (the Church suffering), where souls who died in God's friendship, but imperfectly so, are purified of sins and sinful attachments.

a. Those who die in the grace of God, but still partially attached to sins and sinful desires, undergo a state of purification called Purgatory before entering into heaven, a state that involves both the pain of being cleansed and the certainty of approaching heaven. "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven." Catechism 1030. The Psalmist asks, "Who may go up to the mountain of the Lord? Who can stand in his holy place? The clean of hand and pure of heart." Psalm 24:3. Souls who are in God's friendship, but imperfectly so, are cleansed of sins before entering into their full glory. First Corinthians may also be referring to Purgatory when St. Paul says that those whose works are not made of precious metals that endures, but rather of lesser materials will "be saved, but only as through fire." 1 Cor. 3:15.

b. We can help souls who need to undergo this purification do so more easily by praying for them and offering meritorious actions and sufferings on their behalf. "From the beginning, the church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them. . . . So that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God." Catechism 1032. Judas Maccabeus, a military hero who fought for Jewish independence in the second century, B.C. discovered that some soldiers who had died had worn pagan amulets. He gathered up a collection and to "make atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin." 2 Mac. 12:46.

II. The Church on earth consists of the Latin rite and the Eastern rites, all of whom are under the Pope and governed by the successors

to the Apostles, who are called bishops in the West.

A. Early in Church history, different traditions arose in different areas. There were five central areas: Rome, Constantinople in Asia Minor (now called Turkey), Jerusalem, Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch in Syria. Each area developed different traditions with regard to such things as liturgical style, ways of presenting theology, Biblical interpretation (emphasizing the historical or symbolic meanings), art and music.

1. The Latin rite is the tradition that developed around Rome. It is called the Latin rite because the originals of Church documents (e.g., liturgy and canon law) are written in Latin and then translated into other languages.
2. Twenty-two other traditions eventually developed around the other centers, with Constantinople being the central one in the late classical and early medieval times. As missionaries went out to other countries, such as Russia and the Ukraine, some of these traditions developed in these nations.
3. Unfortunately, the Latin rite and the Eastern churches drifted apart during the early Middle Ages and some differences over theology and papal authority led to a schism in 1054. The churches that separated from Rome are called the Orthodox churches, of which there are 21. For every one of the Orthodox churches, there is an Eastern tradition that remained with or rejoined the Catholic Church, thus making up 21 of the 22 Catholic Eastern rites. Some examples are the Byzantine Catholic Church (based in Greece and Turkey), the Russian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Coptic (Egyptian) Catholic Church. The Maronite rite, based in Lebanon, remained entirely with the Catholic Church.
4. The Eastern rites predominate in Eastern Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and parts of India. The large majority of Catholics outside of these areas are Latin rite. Due to immigration, this country has Catholics from all of the rites.

B. All of the Catholic Church, Latin rite and Eastern rites, are led by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter, and Vicar of Christ. However, in the Latin rite, the Pope governs more explicitly.

1. In union with the Pope are the successors to the Apostles, called bishops in the Latin rite. In the Latin rite, the Pope directly appoints bishops; in the Eastern rite, there are different means of appointing them, all with the approval of the

Pope.

2. The Pope is the final legislator of the Church and must approve of any change in canon law, the law that governs the Church. In the Latin rite, the Pope sometimes makes changes to canon law by his own authority. The Pope also gives general direction to the bishops.
3. The Pope leads the diplomacy of the Church, sending missionaries to the world and defending her independence.
4. The Pope can define Church doctrine on his own authority without a Church council, but it is rare for him to do so outside of the canonization of saints. His statements, such as encyclical letters, usually apply current doctrine to the present situation, or refine current doctrine
5. The Pope is the spiritual leader of the church and sets an example for all of the faithful.
6. A Pope is the Pope for life unless he resigns, which has happened three times in church history. When a Pope dies, the Cardinals of the Church, a special group appointed by the Pope who are usually bishops, elects a new Pope.

C. Each diocese, or geographic area, of the Church is led by a bishop, who is a successor to the Apostles. (The areas are often called eparchies and the successors to the Apostles called eparchs or patriarchs in the Eastern rites.) For example there are two dioceses in Virginia, Arlington and Richmond.

1. The bishop in turn ordains priests to administer the sacraments, offer prayers for the people, govern parishes, and teach by word and example. A priest shares most, but not all of the powers of a bishop, although on a smaller scale. They are co-workers with the bishop and act "in the person of Christ" as his ambassadors. See 2 Cor. 5:20.

- In the Latin rite, only celibate men can be priests. The Eastern rites allow married men to be priests, but not bishops. It is the universal tradition of the Church that priestly celibacy is preferable and that priests do not marry after ordination.

- Because priests act in imitation of Christ, they must be men. Sisters in religious orders represent more the feminine and Marian aspects of the church. "The Church is Marian and Apostolic-Petrine. . . . Mary is Queen of the

Apostles without any pretensions to apostolic powers; she has other and greater powers." John Paul II, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (1988) 27 & f.n. 54.

2. Each diocese in the Latin rite is divided into parishes. There are 68 parishes in the Arlington diocese. Each parish is generally run by a pastor, who is usually but not always a priest of the diocese. (Occasionally, due to a temporary vacancy, a parish may have a temporary administrator rather than a pastor.)

3. The bishop can also ordain permanent deacons to assist him and the priests in such things as the liturgies, teaching, charity, and administration. Like priests, deacons take vows of prayer and obedience, although deacons may be married before ordination.

D. The Bible plainly refers to the Apostles and their authority to appoint other Apostles and assistants. See, e.g., Acts 1:15-26, 6:1-7, 14:1-4, 23, 20:17; 1 Cor. 9:4-6; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 4:11. St. Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus likewise refer to the ordination of Timothy and Titus as local rulers of their churches, and their ability in turn to appoint different offices, such as episcopoi, presbyteroi and diaconoi. See 1 Tim. 3:1-13, 5:17-23; Titus 1:5. Likewise, early Christian documents refer to these offices. See, e.g., First Epistle of Clement sections 42-44 (referring to bishops and deacons, and possibly priests); Epistle of Polycarp ch.5-6 (referring to priests and deacons, with bishops implied); Epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians, ch. 3-7; St. Irenaeus, Against Heretics, book IV, ch. 26. It would take Church tradition to define what these offices are and how they relate to each other.

E. There are also religious orders of men and women, who are consecrated to God in various traditions.

1. Men and women in religious orders take vows of prayer, obedience to superiors, and celibacy, as well as vows of poverty. Religious life takes different forms according to the different spiritualities of the various orders, such as Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian (Jesuit), Salesian, or Carmelite, and the rules governing each order. "The religious [brothers and sisters] recall that wonderful marriage made by God which will be manifest in the age to come, and in which the Church has Christ alone for her spouse." Vatican II Council, Perfectae Caritatis 12. "Holy women are an incarnation of the feminine ideal." John Paul II, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women 27.

- The religious orders usually have houses that have some number of brothers or sisters and provinces that cover a

certain region (e.g., the Eastern third of the United States). The entire order would be united under a final superior, usually in Rome.

2. A religious order brother or sister could be active, contemplative, or semi-contemplative. The terms are somewhat of a misnomer because all of the brothers and sisters are both active and contemplative; but there is a difference in emphasis.

- An "active" brother or sister would usually have some apostolate in the world, such as teaching, missionary work, or work with the poor or elderly; even here, however, the prayer life is the basis for the apostolate. In this diocese, there are a number of active religious orders, including the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters who teach at St. James, as well as St. Michael school and Bishop O'Connell High School.

- A "contemplative" brother or sister, called a monk or nun, does not go out into the world. Rather they usually spend about seven hours a day in prayer, doing some work such as farming or writing to support the order and discipline the spirit. In this diocese, there are several contemplative houses, including the Poor Clares in Alexandria, the Trappists in Berryville, and the contemplative Dominicans in Front Royal.

- There are also semi-contemplative religious brothers and sisters who are between those two models. The sisters of the Missionaries of Charity are examples of semi-contemplative sisters.

III. The faithful in the world are called to vocations. The most common vocation is married life, which brings the sanctity of the Church to families. Some of the faithful are also called to consecrated single life, in which a man or woman is consecrated to prayerful service in the world.

A. Christian married couples are called to imitate the love between Christ and His Church and thus establish what the Catechism calls a "domestic church."

1. Marriage is an institution created by God Himself to bring together the masculine and feminine sides of humanity such that a man and woman would bring each other to holiness through their complimentary love and bring children up in that love. "The respective perfections of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfections of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband. @ Catechism 370. A God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female, He created them." Genesis 1:27.

2. Jesus not only restored marriage back to her primordial holiness and permanence, but also raised the institution to a higher level making marriage and image of the love between Himself and the Church. "In virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, by which they signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church, Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their married lives and in accepting and educating their children." Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium 11. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul describe marriage as this image of the love between Christ and His church, see Eph. 5:21-33, and the Book of Revelation says that at the end of all things on earth, the new Jerusalem will come to Jesus as a bride to her husband. See Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2. Couples receive, not only the natural calling to bring goodness forth from each other and their children, but also a calling to be witnesses of the faith for their children, for their families and for all of the world.

3. Thus, the Church teaches that all marriage is sacred, but that a marriage between Christians is also a special sacrament, in which Christ accepts the promises of the couples, commissions them as His witnesses and promises them His help for as long as life endures. In itself, the family is the primordial society, upon which ever other society is built. See Catechism 2206. Christian couples in particular are called to establish their families as "domestic churches" in which the faith is lived, learned and shown forth to the world. See Catechism 1656, 2204; Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium 11.

B. Some people are also called to consecrated single life. Such people are called to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God, and to special lives of prayer. As St. Paul says, "An unmarried man is anxious about things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. . . . An unmarried woman or virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit." 1 Cor. 7:32, 34.

C. There is a universal call to holiness. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye perfect as Your Father in heaven in perfect." Matt. 5:48. St. Paul addressed most of his letters "to the holy ones" in a given area. As the Vatican II Council said, "All Christians in whatever state or walk in life are called to the fullness of Christian life and perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth. . . . The forms and tasks of life are many but there is one holiness, which is cultivated by all who are led by God's Spirit." Lumen Gentium 40-41.