

RCIA CLASS 9 - THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH;
DEVOTION TO MARY AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

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. 2:31-45; Micah 4:1-4.

1. This new kingdom, would gather all nations together in the peace of God. See, e.g., Is. 66:18- 21; Jer. 3:17-18; Ps. 87:4-6.

2. This new and glorious kingdom would allow people to know God personally, a gift previously given only to the prophets, and in fact only at times even them. See, e.g., Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 36:26-28; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 14:16-21.

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. 3:15-18;

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,” (ecclesia in Greek) 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 in the truth, that the Holy 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, including the assurance that she would be reunited and bring all peoples of the world together. See, e.g., Jer. 34:5-9, 33:14-16; Micah 2:12-13, 4:1-8; Amos 9:9-15. 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 (1965) 9.

4. Jesus promised at the Last Supper to send the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles that they could 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 would be one.

5. 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 nations of the known world 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. In the Bible, the book Acts of the Apostles then describes the early Church up to about 62 A.D., when Saints Peter and Paul were in Rome. From that central city, they preached the Gospel to people for nations throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. There is a progress from Jerusalem, through the nations of the Roman Empire and finally into Rome, where that book ends. Rome eventually became the new capital of the Church on earth.

C. St. Paul also repeatedly spoke 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, 5:21-32; Col. 1:15-20; see also 1 Tim. 3:5, 15 (describing the Church as the household of God.)

1. The letters of St. Paul, as well as the Book of Revelation, 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 5:14; 3 John 6, 10. There is thus both one universal church and specific churches in every area throughout the world.

2. As Pope Pius XII explained 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 government 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 that exists in regular communities of the earth.

II. The Church is the People of God, not only on this earth, but also in heaven and in purgatory.

A. 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; see also Phil. 1:9-11 (referring to all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth as honoring the names of Jesus Christ.) We call the Church in heaven the Church triumphant; and we use the term “saints” for the glorious company in heaven who intercedes for us. And we refer to the holy souls in purgatory as the ones who are being purified after this life.

B. There will be a general resurrection at the end of all things on earth. But Jesus made it clear that, even now, the dead are beginning to enjoy the first fruits of the resurrection. See, e.g., John 5:25. Thus, for example, when Jesus died and rose again, many of the dead appeared to the living. See Matt. 27:51-53. And, even now, the dead know about and care about what is happening on earth. Thus, they are distressed at injustice, but rejoice in repentant sinners. See Rev. 6:9-11; Luke 15:3-7. As then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, said in his book Eschatology, i.e., the study of the last things, the faithful departed would not, even if they could, enter into their full glory until the full complement of people are there with them to enjoy it. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Eschatology (1977) 186.

C. Because they care deeply for us, the saints intercede for us, joining our prayers to theirs. “Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven consolidate the holiness of the whole church, add to the nobility of the worship that the church offers to God here on earth, and in many ways help in a greater building up of the church.” Lumen Gentium 49. Scripture has examples of the saints praying with and for God’s people.

1. Thus, for example, the Book of Revelation records, “Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense which are the prayers of the holy ones.” Rev. 5:8.

2. Likewise, The Second Book of Maccabees, which recounts the Jewish war of independence against Hellenistic overlords in the second century B.C., recounts that the leader of the revolution Judas Maccabeus “cheered them all by relating a dream, a kind of vision, worthy of belief. . . . What he saw was this. Onias, the former high priest, a good and virtuous man . . . was praying with outstretched arms for the whole Jewish community.” 2 Macc. 15:11-12. Judas Maccabeus also saw Jeremiah the prophet, who had lived over 400 years earlier, praying for his people. See 2 Macc. 15:13-17.

3. And, likewise, because of the deep concern of the saints for us, in a way, we can bring happiness to them by coming closer to them with our holiness. As Jesus says in one of the parables of the lost sheep, there is great joy in heaven over each repentant sinner. See Luke 15:7.

D. As a result of their example and their intercessions, devotion to the saints is common among Catholics. Saints are certainly models for us. But they are also friends who guide us on the way. We are, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, “Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” Heb. 12:1.

- To assist this devotion, the Church “canonizes” certain people, calling them saint. The term “saint” comes from the Latin word *sanctus*, which means “holy one.” There is a universal call to holiness; and, using the broad definition of the term,

every person in heaven is a saint. However, to guarantee that certain people are worthy of veneration and are powerful intercessors, the Church also canonizes certain people as official saints, and therefore models of Catholic life, worthy of veneration by the whole Church.

E. 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.

F. However, except the Blessed Virgin Mary (and possibly a few others such as Enoch, Moses and Elijah) the saints do not have their bodies back yet. And, therefore, there will also be a resurrection of the dead, when all of history will be fulfilled and the saints will receive their full glory. See, e.g., 1 Thess. 4:16-18; Rev. 21-22.

G. 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. The Church teaches that Mary is the Mother of God (that is Mother of Jesus, the Son of God), was conceived without original sin, is ever-virgin, was assumed into heaven, and is now the Queen of heaven and earth. See outline for week 7 for a more detailed description of these teachings.

H. 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.

1. Those who die in the grace of God, but still partially attached to sins and sinful desires, excessively attached to lesser things, undergo a state of purification called Purgatory before entering into heaven. This state 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; see also Rev. 21:27 (nothing unclean may enter heaven.) 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 endure, but rather of lesser materials will “be saved, but only as through fire.” 1 Cor. 3:15.

2. 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.

- Certainly salvation is earned by Jesus Christ through His Death and Resurrection. But, as Jesus after raising Lazarus from the dead left it to his family and friends to release him from the burial bands, so also Jesus allows us to participate in the glory of the faithful departed by praying and sacrificing for their entrance into heaven. See John 11:1-44.

III. 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 and the western part of the Roman Empire generally. It is called the Latin rite both because it first started in the Latin speaking part of the Roman Empire and because the originals of most of her universal 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 Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine, some of these traditions developed in these nations.

3. Unfortunately, the Latin side of the Church 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 Catholic Churches. 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 churches, Catholic and Orthodox predominate in Eastern Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and parts of India. Largely because the missionary efforts from the sixteenth century to the present were mostly from Latin rite countries, 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 churches within the Catholic Church, Latin and Eastern, are led by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter, and Vicar of Christ on earth. However, in the Latin rite, the Pope governs more directly.

1. In union with the Pope are the successors to the Apostles, called bishops in the Latin tradition. In the Latin side of the Church, the Pope directly appoints bishops. In the Eastern Catholic churches, there are different means of appointing bishops; but even in the Eastern Catholic churches, the appointment of a bishop still requires 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 tradition, 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 evangelization and diplomacy of the Church, sending missionaries to the world and defending her independence. The Vatican City State, a sovereign nation mostly located inside the city of Rome, is at the capital of the Church on earth and is meant to defend the independence of the papacy and the Church as a whole.

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 explain and develop 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 four times in church history, most recently with Pope Benedict XVI. When a Pope dies or retires, 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 churches) 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 side of the Church, only celibate men can be priests. (There are a few exceptions for Anglican ministers and some other ministers who have converted to the Church.) The Eastern churches 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.” St. Pope 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 70 parishes in the Arlington diocese. Each parish is generally run by a pastor (or administrator), who is usually but not always a priest of the diocese. In this diocese, all of the pastors are priests, but the pastors of ten parishes are members of religious orders.

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: 23, 20:17; see also Acts 14:1-4 (referring to Saints Paul and Barnabas as apostles); 1 Cor. 9:4-6; Eph. 4:11 (referring to the general office of apostles.) St. Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus likewise refer to their ordination as local rulers of their churches, and their ability in turn to appoint different officials, 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.

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

A. 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, Redemptorist, 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.” Pope St. John Paul II, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women 27.

B. The religious orders usually have houses of brothers or sisters and provinces that cover a certain region (e.g., the Eastern third of the United States). The entire order is generally united under a final superior, often living in Rome, such as the Father General for the Jesuits, the Master of the Order of Preachers for the Dominicans or the Minister General of each branch the Franciscans.

C. 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.

1. 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.

2. A “contemplative” brother or sister, called a monk or nun, does not go out into the world. Rather they usually spend about seven or eight 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.

3. 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.

4. There are also “third orders” for many of the religious orders, such as Third Order Carmelites, Franciscans and Dominicans. These third orders generally consist of people in the world who are participating in the spirituality and work of the order.

V. The faithful in the world are all called to vocations. The most common vocation is married life, which bring 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. “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. In the Church, there are also many lay organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus and the Legion of Mary. There are also organizations, sometimes called, societies of apostolic life, which have apostolates in the world, and usually combine the efforts of laity with those of consecrated men and women. The Youth Apostles here in this diocese and Opus Dei, which is a personal prelature, are examples of such organizations. In addition, there are many private unofficial efforts such as schools and bookstores, to support the Catholic apostolate in the world.

VI. 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.