Catholic Identity: Celebrate the Difference
Session 3
A Catholic Understanding of God

Pres-Session Assignment

Read Chapters 10 & 11 of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.* An online version is available here: https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/uscca/files/assets/basic-html/page-1.html#

LECTURE 1: INTRODUCTION

Discussion Questions:

How does the Church as the Body of Christ shape your faith?

How is the hierarchy valuable in your growth in faith? What sources of spiritual strength do you receive from the church's structure: parish, diocese, universal Church?

LECTURE 2: THE ORIGIN OF AND OUR NEED FOR THE CHURCH

- Our Catholic Identity is not about *what* we do, but *who* we are and *whose* we are. It's about our conversion – our turning away from sin and turning to Christ who is the source of our salvation.
- God wants a relationship with His people and that relationship is lived out and expressed most fully through the Body of Christ – the Church.
    - The Church exists to draw people into a personal relationship with Christ Jesus that leads to their conversion and salvation in Christ Jesus.
- To fully understand the Church, we must go back to the Old Testament. As Catholics we believe that the existence of Israel and the call of the Jewish people was a remote preparation for the Church.
    - God established a covenant relationship with a single person – Abraham, which he then expands to a family, which he forms into twelve tribes, and then those tribes are formed into a nation, which is then formed into a kingdom and finally that kingdom is formed into a Church which is rooted in Christ Jesus himself.
    - Each of these steps involved a covenant that was broken by the sin of the people. Now through Jesus we have a *new and eternal* covenant that cannot be broken.
    - The blood and water flowing from Christ's side on the cross has always been understood as the birth of the Church. It is both human (water) and divine (blood).
    - The Church was made manifest to the world on Pentecost.
- Did Jesus found the Church? YES!
    - Jesus was born as the God-Man to usher in a New Covenant through the shedding of his blood for all people; to end the division of humankind caused by sin; to make the human whole once again; and to reveal the Father's love with an invitation to enter into a personal relationship with him.
    - This new Covenant IS Jesus Christ, and it is meant for all people.
    - In his public ministry – by preaching and teaching, by calling the apostles and sharing his power and authority with them – Jesus founded the Church.
    - St. Matthew draws direct parallels between the Twelve Tribes, Moses, and Israel and the Church to demonstrate that the Church is the new Israel that exists as God's chosen people.
    - St. Luke's Gospel and his Acts of the Apostles portrays a direct parallel between the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel and the work of the Church in Acts to convey that the salvific work of Jesus is continued and maintained through the Church, most especially through the Sacramental life.
- Why do we need a Church?
    - It is what the Father wanted! Sacred Scripture reveals that the Church was a part of God's plan for his people.
    - The Church continues the ministry of Jesus.

Discussion Question:

In what ways do you participate in the life of the Church and how has your relationship with God been strengthen by that participation?

LECTURE 3: THE FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Which came first – the New Testament or the Church?

- It was the Church, and through the Church the New Testament was born under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Church is One

- It is one because its founder is one – Father, Son & Holy Spirit (Blessed Trinity)
- There was one flock and one shepherd which created visible unity of the N.T
- The Church is one in faith, one in Baptism, one in the Body of Christ
- Christians were united in the way they worshipped and how they lived out their discipleship.

The Church is Holy

- It is also clear that the NT Church was marked by holiness.
- The church is referred to in Sacred Scripture as a Holy Nation, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Living God, the Holy Ones, a people set apart for all to see.
- Holiness means "set apart"; more specifically, set apart for God – for God's Kingdom
- The Church is holy because of her union with God – we did nothing to earn holiness – it is a gift!
- Part of the holiness of the early Church was that some lived as celibates for the sake of the kingdom.
- The Church celebrated the saints.

The Church is Catholic (i.e., universal)

- The Church of the New Testament did not belong to an exclusive group of people – it was for everyone and by design it was to always welcome new people.
- Great commission of Matthew 29: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all that I have revealed to you."

The Church is Apostolic

- In his writing St Paul was very clear that the Church was built on the foundation of the apostles; that the Church was to preserve the traditions and teachings it had received and hand them on to others.
- The Church's authority is rooted in Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition (i.e., that which is handed down), and the Magisterium.
- The Church does not have the authority to add to or change what God has divinely revealed and ordained through Jesus Christ, Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. It does have the authority to interpret the meaning and application of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition to modern issues.
- The early Church is also apostolic because, like the apostles, it is called to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all that Christ revealed.
- We see in the New Testament the establishment of a structure: bishops, presbyters (i.e., priests), and deacons.

Discussion Questions:

THE CHURCH IS ONE

How do I build up the Body of Christ within my parish, family, or ministry?

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

What does is mean for me personally to be "set apart for God?" What habits help me grow closer to Christ and live a holy life?

TH CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

What is my role in "making disciples of all nations?" Who in my life may be waiting for an invitation to encounter Jesus Christ or in need of conversion and what am I going to do about it?

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

What am I doing to deepen my understanding of the faith? How do I intentionally hand on the faith to others in my family, workplace, parish, or local community?

LECTURE 4: ECUMENICAL DIFFERENCES

THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF OTHER CHRISTIAN DEMONIATIONS

- Since Vatican II the Catholic Church has made significant efforts in ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue with Protestant communions and Orthodox Churches. We are all united by our Baptism.
- The fullness of the Church is lived and expressed in the Catholic Church. The Orthodox Churches and Protestant communions while in communion with the Catholic Church because of our common baptism and many shared beliefs, are not in full communion because of the differences that exist. This is why when someone baptized in an ecclesial community or Orthodox Church becomes Catholic they a considered entering into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Protestant Understanding of the Church

- Protestant Churches rooted in "Sola Scriptura" (Scripture alone). So, while they affirm the role of Sacred Scripture in the life of the disciple and the Church, they do not subscribe to Sacred Tradition.
- The Protestant Reformers taught that the individual believer, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can interpret the meaning of Sacred Scripture. The Catholic Church teaches that while the Holy Spirit assists an individual to understand the Scriptures, one is guided by the Tradition of the Catholic Church (i.e., the writings of the early Church Fathers, saints, scholars, and official teachings of the Church through Popes and Councils.)
- There are only a handful of Scripture passages that have definitively interpreted by the Church (e.g., the real presence of the Eucharist in Jn 6:22-71, the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper, the authority of Peter and his successors Mt 16:19, etc.)

The Issue with Sola Scriptura

- It ignores the fact that Scripture is born under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit from Sacred Tradition. (e.g., the use of Paul's letters in the early Church as exhortations and teachings was well established before they were deemed divinely inspired and included in the Canon of Sacred Scripture.)
- If everyone can interpret the meaning of Sacred Scripture for themselves, then absolute truth is compromised and reduced to what is relative to the individual. Individuals become their own authority. When disagreements occur, the group fractures, which has led to over than 30,000 Protestant denominations.

The Church Christ founded subsists fully in the Catholic Church:

- Creed (what we believe)
- Sacraments (how we celebrate)
- Bishops (apostolic succession and foundation)
- Charity (love of neighbor)

The Church exists beyond this world as well in the Communion of Saints:

- Church Militant (still fighting the fight, day by day)
- Church Suffering (those who have died and whose souls are being purified in purgatory)
- Church Triumphant (the souls who now share in victory of salvation with God in heaven)

Discussion Questions:

What does the establishment of the Church reveal about Jesus' desire to guide His people in truth?

The Church offers the fullness of faith through the Creed, Sacraments, Apostolic Succession, and Charity. Which of these has most helped you encounter Jesus personally?

How does the hope of heaven influence the way you live your faith today?

REMINDERS

- The Course Facilitator will notify the Office for Catechetical Formation of your course completion.
- The Office for Catechetical Formation will update your certification record within two weeks and email you a copy of your catechetical record. If you have completed your Master Certification, a certificate will also be sent via email.
- It is ***YOUR*** responsibility to forward a copy of the certification record to the Principal and/or Director of Religious Education.
- If you do not receive your record ***after*** two weeks, contact the Office of Catechetical Formation via email: phillyocf@archphila.org.
- Your feedback is important to us as we strive to improve our courses. Please take five minutes to complete the course survey using the QR code provided on this handout.

CLOSING PRAYER:

The Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thine intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence,
I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins,
my mother;
to thee do I come, before thee I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

