




# CHAPTER ONE

The Catholic Understanding  
of the Church



# Chapter 1

- Forming a people to be God's own.
- The Church is the people of God.
- The 4 marks of the Church
  - One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.



# Why Study Our History?

- As a rule **most religions can not trace their source**
  - Their source is generally lost in the tracks of the remote past.
- The History of **Christendom**, is an **outstanding exception** to this tendency
  - We know the **historic** environment in which it arose
  - We even possess the **letters of its founders**; and
  - We can **trace** the detail of **the successive stages** of its development to our time.

# Why Study Our History?

- Christianity, as represented by the **History of the Catholic Church**, in contrast to most other religions, **is comprehensively documented**, and thereby open to the full light of investigation.
  - Steeped in history, it has **necessarily adapted** to new challenges and tensions.
  - Sometimes the **challenge** has been the harmonizing of its sacred writings, its ancient and vested traditions, with the **changing circumstances** of over two millennia.
  - The **survival** of the Catholic Church **is a testimony** of its **continued relevance, vitality and divine guidance**.

# Why Study Our History?

- Yet, for some **Modern Catholics** - *perceiving* that **our culture is changing rapidly**, the call to adapt rapidly - sometimes at the cost of our sacred writings and traditions - **creates tension** with **Traditionalists** who want to hold fast to the past
  - For many **modern Catholics**, the church moves **too slow** while for most **traditionalists** the church moves **too fast**.
- What we will learn in studying our history is that **this tension** regarding change **has burdened us since Apostolic times**
  - **St Pius X** on this issue once proclaimed: “**The only real enemy of the church is ignorance.**”
- ☑ **Let us therefore study our history and not be ignorant!**

# To Form a People

- The Old Testament contains the history of God's chosen people. God sought to repair the loss of friendship between Himself and the human race, by selecting various leaders, who while not perfect - sought to be faithful to God.
- God established His connection with the human race, through a series of covenants, wherein the terms of an evolving relationship were set down to teach us conformance to God's law which represented His will.
- God chose Noah and Abraham and Moses and David, successively to be His mediators and covenantal agents.

# To Form a People

- “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (Gal 4:4-5).
- More than friendship, the people of God were meant to be a family, for God in Himself is a family.
  - ★ “For God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since He has in Himself Fatherhood, Sonship and the essence of a family, which is love.”  
Pope John Paul II, on 28 Jan 1979.
- We have the Son of God, as our brother - and the Father, Himself, as Our Father who is in Heaven.

# To Form a People

- A New and final Testament, governing the present age is a **covenant in His Son (The Messiah), our mediator.** (1 Tim 2:5).
- God's final plan for forming a family included a mediator, who is at once both **True God and True man**, so that nothing would be lacking in the our restoration.
- The Son established a church **with all of us as its members.** **To do so He, as man, would** leave His Father and mother, **and cleave to us as His bride, and in so doing** we became One flesh **with Him.** (Gen 2:24).
- As one would expect in the Jewish tradition, that new covenant would be in the blood of the Bridegroom.



# The Church

- The Church, then is the **people of God of the New Covenant**. These, include us who **believe in Jesus as the Messiah**, who as the first fruits of what we will become - died and rose from the dead so that we might likewise conquer death
  - We thereby also **possess the Holy Spirit** and have His life and power within us.
- **The Church, is also the Kingdom of God on earth** - it will never end, subject only to being perfected at His second coming **(Lk 1:33)**
- **Jesus promises to be with His Church, always**, to the close of this age. **(Mt 28:20)**. Thereafter, we shall be with Him in heaven, adorned as a pure bride. **(Rev 19:7-8)**.

# The Church

- How then do we recognize His Church, the Bride of Christ?



- We look for **four marks**, as expressed in the Nicene Creed:  
it is **One**,  
it is **Holy**,  
it is **Catholic**, and  
it is **Apostolic**.
- Let us look at these in turn.

# One

- There is a unity in the Church that is distinctive. The Church being the Body of Christ - is one Body. It is also one Spirit, ... one hope, with one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph 4:4-6)
- ★ Acts 15 - The Council of Jerusalem, demonstrates that unity is preserved by ecumenical councils of the heirs to the Apostles meeting under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Jesus prayed for that unity precisely so we could believe that through the testimony of the church, that Christ was sent by the Father (Jn 17:21)
- That unity is invisible through the Holy Spirit, and visible through its creeds, liturgy and sacraments.

# Holy

- **Holy does not only mean “saintly.”** Holy means **set apart** for God or at His direction. The Pope, our **Holy Father**, *is not holy in the sense that he is without sin*, he **is Holy** having been set apart to sit in the chair of Peter and guide the Church
- The Church is itself Holy being **set apart, consecrated to God** and His purposes in the world, to **guide the people of God**
- **We**, who have been **Baptized into His Body the Church**, are also **Holy** - *consecrated to God* - a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation*, therefore a people set apart, His handiwork (**Eph 2:10; 1 Ptr 2:9**)
- As now deceased **Pope Benedict XVI** on **19 Apr 2005** said:  
“**I am a humble servant in the vineyard of the Lord.**”  
He understood the meaning of being a **Holy Father**

# Catholic

- Catholic (καθολικισμός) means universal. Catholic Church became synonymous with orthodox - embracing all truth.
- Today, *given the rise of other sectarian expressions* - Catholic Church is that church historically traceable to Apostolic times
  - While salvation may not be limited to those who are indeed members of the “Catholic Church”
    - It is the case that there is only **one Church of Jesus Christ** built by Him, as He announced at Caesarea Philippi. (cf Mt 16:18).
- **If there is to be one such church**, it must necessarily be universal and also orthodox - lest His bride teach error.

# Apostolic

- The Church was **not meant to be Gnostic** - whose truths might be only known by a few. On the contrary **Jesus commanded that His Apostles, go to all the nations and make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and Holy Spirit.**
- The Apostles, the **first magisterium (teaching office)** were to teach others to **observe all Jesus had commanded (Mt 28: 19-20)**
  - The **mission** of the Apostles was to carry the **Good News**, and to be the **witnesses of Truth** to a world that had not met Jesus
  - ★ Both their **Apostolic Authority** and **Tradition** is protected and passed down to our **Bishops** by an **unbroken line of succession**, - who take the **same office** vacated by the death of the Apostles. **(Acts 1:20, 26)**. The Church is built on the **foundation of these Apostles and the prophets. (Eph 2:20)**.