

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Fifth Sunday of Easter • Year B • April 28, 2024



*Creator God,
You replant
your holy garden
with Christ the living vine
upon which your people
are grafted.
Give continued growth
to your Church
throughout the world
that all her members
manifest your love in word
and speech.*

Sunday Word

Acts 9:26-31
Psalm 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

Peaceful Church

Barnabas vouches for Paul to the Apostles, who are understandably skeptical given how Paul had formerly persecuted the Church. Paul and others preach the Good News, which results in more conversions.

Confident Church

Saint John exhorts the Church to be confident in keeping God's Commandment to believe in the name of Christ and to love others according to his way.

Fruitful Church

Jesus describes himself as the true vine. Those who remain in him bear much fruit. Our heavenly Father will prune from the vine those members who turn their faces from the light.

Church Teaching: The Church as the Body of Christ

To understand the mystery contained in the above phrase, it is necessary to ponder each of the three terms within it. Each term helps to illuminate the whole: Church, Body, and Christ.

Church

The term "church" is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. This term appears in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and in various references in the New Testament, most notably in the writings of Paul.

Two main terms are used in both testaments to refer to the People of God: *ekklesia* and *synagogue*. But because Jews of Jesus' time and thereafter used the latter term to denote their gatherings, Greek-speaking Christians selected the former—not only to signal continuity with the faith of their Old Testament forebears but also to suggest that theirs was a new People of God founded upon Christ.

Ekklesia literally mean “gathering” or “assembly.” For the first Christians and for us, the Church is that convocation of believers who, formerly scattered and divided by the chaos of sin, are now brought together by Christ’s saving action.

Body

This “place,” however, is not a building. The Church is a body in the true sense of that word: the entire material structure of a living organism. The Body of Christ that is the Church exhibits both human and divine characteristics.

In its humanity, the Church is constituted by those who confess faith in Christ, its Head. In its divinity, those who are called together in Christ are animated by and gifted with the Holy Spirit from above.

Christ

This ecclesial body has been given a mission. The Church does not simply exist for her own sake. She is to accomplish what Christ has set out for her as her mission. She is to be the sacrament that promotes the union of all men and women with God. In other words, the Church is the instrument of Christ. She works for the Salvation of all.

Five important consequences flow from this missionary mandate. First, the Spirit provides the Church with charisms so that she might be effective. Second, the authority of the Church comes from above. Third, she exhibits hierarchy, in that Christ her founder called the Apostles to himself as his witnesses, whose sacred work continues in the pope and the bishops—all that people might be served. Fourth, the Church is a vehicle for God’s grace. And finally, the Church is a communion of all her living members and all who have gone before us in faith, one household that partakes of the holiness of God.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Given this one complex living reality, we Catholics assert that the Church is one with Christ. Her unity is that of head and body, as with groom and bride. Therefore, we place our faith in the Church inasmuch as she is one with her Head, Christ.

Key Terms

CHARISM

Specific gift or grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit that benefits the Church so that a person might be an effective Christian (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 799).

HIERARCHY

Apostles and their successors, the bishops, given authority to teach, sanctify, and rule by Christ in his name (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 873).

MISSIONARY MANDATE

Denotes that as Christ was sent by the Father, so Christ sends his Church to continue his work on earth; all her members contribute each in their own way to this work (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 849).

Voices of Faith

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Now what is this one body? The faithful throughout the whole world, both which are, and which have been and which shall be.

— Saint John Chrysostom

Paul holds that the Church is not only an organism but really becomes the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where we all receive his Body and really become his Body. Thus is brought about the spousal mystery that all become one body and one spirit in Christ.

— Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

751 (Church as *ekklesia*), 752 (trifold meaning of “Church”), 771 (manifold dimensions of Church), 789 (Body of Christ), 852 (missionary mandate and Holy Spirit)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 10 (The Church: Reflecting the Light of Christ), especially the section entitled “Upon This Rock—A Community of Love,” pages 119–121

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

147 (Church), 149 (origin and fulfillment of Church), 150 (Church’s mission)