

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time • Year B • June 16, 2024



*O God,
you plant the seeds
of your holy kingdom
in our lives
through your Son,
Jesus Christ.
Continue to send us your grace
that the seeds you have planted
may spring up and bear
great fruit.*

Sunday Word

Ezekiel 17:22-24
Psalm 92:2-3, 13-16
2 Corinthians 5:6-10
Mark 4:26-34

God Gives the Growth

The prophet paints a word-picture using the images of planting: the high tree, lowly tree, green tree, and withered tree. The images illustrate how, by the hand of God, his people will flourish and prosper.

We Walk by Faith

Saint Paul emphasizes that believers navigate this world by faith—faith that informs our vision. As his faithful people, we strive to please God and work to build up his kingdom as we prepare to be judged by Christ.

Miraculous Harvest

Jesus preaches about the kingdom. He uses everyday images of farming to make his point that God's kingdom is "naturally" growing. Its fruitful harvest will seem just as miraculous as when a farmer plants seeds and those seeds later sprout up into a large plant.

Church Teaching: The Church and the Kingdom of God

The Priority of the Kingdom

The first words Jesus speaks when he begins his public ministry are in reference to the Kingdom of God (see Mark 1:15.) Jesus, the Son of God, came among us to proclaim the Good News of Salvation and the new life he offers to all.

With Christ's advent, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated. We believe that although the kingdom is present here and now, it is not yet fully realized. When Christ returns a second time to this world in glory, he will bring the fullness of God's kingdom. What happens in the meantime?

The reality that sustains us, prepares us for, and moves us closer toward that Second Coming and the fullness of the kingdom is the Church. For this reason the Church is described as "the seed" of the Kingdom of God by the Second Vatican Council.

The Necessity of the Church

When believers gather at Sunday Mass, they speak the words of the Nicene Creed and profess their belief in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. It is important to note that just as we specify placing our belief in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we also mention by name the Church as an object of faith. Why? Because the Church is the Body of Christ, who is its head, in whom all the individual members are united with each other, and which is joined to Christ as bride to bridegroom.

Members of the Church have thus been called out of a former way of life, called away from sin to be joined together into the temple of the Spirit by Christ himself. The goal of this assembly is precisely life in Christ—that is, Salvation.

God Alone Saves

The Church exists because people need saving. That is why the Second Vatican Council restated the ancient understanding that outside the Church, Salvation is not possible. This statement may seem, at first, to be shocking, until one reflects on the word “outside.”

In other words, the Church is meant for everyone and relates to everyone in the world because her Head, the Lord Jesus, is the sole mediator between God and all people. He alone is the way to Salvation and he is present to us in his Body, which is the Church.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Jesus explicitly asserts the necessity of faith and Baptism (see Mark 16:16 and John 3:5) and thereby affirms the necessity of the Church, which all enter through Baptism. The teaching on the Church as the sole vehicle by which all men and women have access to the Kingdom of God is meant to be less a judgment of the non-baptized than it is an explanation of the Church’s all-encompassing role in helping the world toward the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the Church affirms that all those who seek God with a sincere heart and, prompted by grace, strive in their actions to do God’s will through the dictates of their consciences, may attain Salvation. A bond exists between all peoples deriving from a common origin and destiny in God. Thus whatever is good and true in other religions comes from God and reflects, however incompletely, the awesome truth of his kingdom.

Key Terms

KINGDOM OF GOD

Not a geographical place but the reign, dominion, or rule of God, announced by Jesus, present in his person, remaining in our midst in the Eucharist (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 541).

NICENE CREED

Profession of faith held by the churches of the East and West; it was formulated by the first two ecumenical councils in the fourth century (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 195).

SALVATION

Forgiveness of sins that repairs the friendship a person has with God, something that only God can do for us (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 169).

Voices of Faith

And the tradition handed down to us is that there is one God and one Christ, one hope and one faith, one church and one baptism appointed only in that one church. Whoever departs from that unity must be found in company with heretics. . .

—Saint Cyprian

The Church’s mission is not to preserve power, or to gain wealth; her mission is to offer Christ, to give a share in Christ’s own life, [our] most precious good, which God himself gives us in his Son.

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 543 (everyone called to kingdom), 545 (sinners and kingdom), 553 (keys of the kingdom), 846 (necessity of Church for Salvation), 848 (God leads non-Christians to faith)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Chapter 11 (The Four Marks of the Church), especially the section entitled “The Church Is Catholic,” pages 129–132

Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church: 158 (Church as bride of Christ), 164 (Church and unity of all Christians), 168 (all belong to Church), 169 (relationship with Jewish people), 170 (bond between Church and non-Christians), 171 (Church and Salvation)

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