

*Companion Notes*  
**Church of the Holy Apostles**

12.10.07



*Scripture*

*Isaiah 35:1-6,10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11*

On our spiritual journey we're eventually faced with a similar question that Saint John the Baptist asks: "Jesus, are you really who you say you are?" Some Christians deal with this question more times than others but the question itself is not a bad thing. In fact, during his ministry Jesus himself presents that very question to us (Mark 8:29). In our walk of faith there's really no reason to not treat this question like any other question brought forth in normal conversation: Ask the question, then kind of get out of the way of ourselves and wait silently for the answer. Before Jesus asks that question of us, however, he asks something else first: "Who do men say that I am?" (Mark 8:27). That question is frequently answered for us in various television documentaries and books which seem to doubt the divinity of Jesus. Sometimes it's the influence of those very types of shows and books that lead us to ask who Jesus is and other times it may be prompted by some form of suffering or just going through a rough time. Our faith needs to be challenged in order to strengthen and grow. John the Baptist dedicated his life to proclaiming the coming of the Messiah; and when he finally did arrive to begin his ministry, John ended up in prison. That is faith being challenged. With John's experience in dealing with human corruption, he may have been a little surprised by Christ's gentle way and was expecting from our Lord demonstrative denouncements of human institutions. Jesus answers John's question by citing examples of physical miracles. John the Baptist was a prophet and a man of faith, therefore his questioning of Jesus was not likely based on a lack of faith, but rather to satisfy the curiosity of his own followers as whether or not to follow Jesus now that John has been imprisoned. As a prophet, John may have already known that his arrest marked the end of his calling, the end of the Old Testament prophets and marked a new beginning which would have eternal value. How has Jesus answered your question of who he is? He is the Savior of the world, and so, what has he said or done in your life that offers assurance to your own convictions of who Jesus is? Certainly, individual reflection will produce various answers but in this season of hope amidst all the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping, it's good to sit quietly and reflect on what Jesus has done and continues to do in your own life. There's a lot of noise pollution in the shopping malls and yet what Christmas celebrates is God becoming a baby and entering into the world in the stillness of the night. As Jesus begins to speak to the crowds about John, it's not so much John's personal sanctity that our Lord is praising, although he certainly was a very holy man, but Christ is pointing out where John fits in according to the divine plan which he so faithfully carried out. As our Lord proclaims, it was not the scenery of the desert with its reeds swayed by the wind; nor was John a well-dressed man, therefore, many were convinced that John was a prophet and it is for this reason that they journeyed into the desert to hear him preach. And Jesus confirms that John was indeed a prophet, and more than a prophet. He was a prophet because he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, and more than a prophet because he saw the Messiah which was a privilege not given to any other prophet. Although John had many followers, it was probably a shock to all present to hear Christ proclaim him as the greatest prophet of all; and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Most likely the "least" is a reference to ordinary people like you and I. John, as great as he was, was slain before Christ's crucifixion and therefore did not witness nor have any knowledge of the Gospel in its fullness; and we, the children of the post-Resurrection, have been blessed with this knowledge. St. Paul writes: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" Therefore, you are no longer a servant but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God" (Galatians 4:4-7). Adoption, therefore, is greater than servitude.

## Church of the Holy Apostles



### From the Catechism ...

**811** "This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic." These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.

**812** Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these properties from her divine source. But their historical manifestations are signs that also speak clearly to human reason. As the First Vatican Council noted, the "Church herself, with her marvelous propagation, eminent holiness, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in everything good, her catholic unity and invincible stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable witness of her divine mission."

**813** *The Church is one because of her source:* "the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit." The Church is one *because of her founder:* for "the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, . . . restoring the unity of all in one people and one body." The Church is one *because of her "soul":* "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity." Unity is of the essence of the Church:

What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her "Church."

**814** From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great *diversity* which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together. Among the Church's members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. "Holding a rightful place in the communion of the Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions." The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church's unity. Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity. And so the Apostle has to exhort Christians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

**815** What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity "binds everything together in perfect harmony." But the unity of the pilgrim Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion:

- profession of one faith received from the Apostles;
- common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments;
- apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God's family.

**830** The word "catholic" means "universal," in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole." The Church is catholic in a double sense:

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.

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**831** Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race:

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one. . . . The character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods, under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit.

**832** "The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament. . . . In them the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated. . . . In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present, through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is constituted."

The phrase "particular Church," which is first of all the diocese (or eparchy), refers to a community of the Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession. These particular Churches "are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists."

Particular Churches are fully catholic through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome "which presides in charity." "For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord." Indeed, "from the incarnate Word's descent to us, all Christian churches everywhere have held and hold the great Church that is here [at Rome] to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Savior's promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her."

**835** "Let us be very careful not to conceive of the universal Church as the simple sum, or . . . the more or less anomalous federation of essentially different particular churches. In the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she put down her roots in a variety of cultural, social, and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world." The rich variety of ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites, and theological and spiritual heritages proper to the local churches "unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided Church."

**863** The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is "sent out" into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways. "The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well." Indeed, we call an apostolate "every activity of the Mystical Body" that aims "to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth."

**865** The Church is ultimately *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic* in her deepest and ultimate identity, because it is in her that "the Kingdom of heaven," the "Reign of God," already exists and will be fulfilled at the end of time. The kingdom has come in the person of Christ and grows mysteriously in the hearts of those incorporated into him, until its full eschatological manifestation. Then all those he has redeemed and made "holy and blameless before him in love," will be gathered together as the one People of God, the "Bride of the Lamb, the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." For "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb*."

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**IN BRIEF**

**866** The Church is one: she acknowledges one Lord, confesses one faith, is born of one Baptism, forms only one Body, is given life by the one Spirit, for the sake of one hope (cf. *Eph* 4:3-5), at whose fulfillment all divisions will be overcome.

**867** The Church is holy: the Most Holy God is her author; Christ, her bridegroom, gave himself up to make her holy; the Spirit of holiness gives her life. Since she still includes sinners, she is "the sinless one made up of sinners." Her holiness shines in the saints; in Mary she is already all-holy.

**868** The Church is catholic: she proclaims the fullness of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation. She is sent out to all peoples. She speaks to all men. She encompasses all times. She is "missionary of her very nature" (AG 2).

**869** The Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (*Rev* 21:14). She is indestructible (cf. *Mt* 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops.

**870** "The sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, . . . subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines" (LG 8).

Word Wise

**One** – This refers to the unity of Catholics, who are bonded together by Christ in his Spirit with shared beliefs and values.

**Holy** – Our union with the Holy Spirit engenders holiness in each of us. This is seen in the striving of ordinary people to live loving, holy and worthwhile lives.

**Catholic** – The word catholic means universal. Our church has heard Christ's call to bring the good news of salvation to all nations and continues to fulfill this mission.

**Apostolic** – Our church was founded on the apostles, the witnesses chosen and sent by Christ himself. It is apostolic also because it guards and transmits the teaching of the apostles under the guidance of the Spirit. The church is apostolic because it is taught, sanctified and guided by their successors, the pope and bishops, and the priests who assist them.

***Don't forget to read and reflect on the Scripture Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A, and do the Journal Keeping on p.11 of your Catechumen's Companion.***