

# Gathering as Church



## Reflection on the Opening Ritual

*What part of the opening ritual most helped you have a sense of God's presence with us? Why?*

The people of Nazareth with whom Jesus gathered for prayer in the synagogue “looked intently at him . . . and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth” (Luke 4:20–22). In our prayer together we too are sometimes awestruck at the knowledge that Jesus is with us and speaks gracious words to us whenever we gather in his name.

*When have you gathered with others and been aware of Jesus' presence?*

Gathering of participants,  
World Youth Day, Veltins  
Arena in Gelsenkichen,  
Germany, August 14, 2005.

# The People of God

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*What is the relationship between the Covenant and the Church?*

## Faith vocabulary

### Covenant

The solemn agreement between God and his people in which they mutually committed themselves to each other; the new and everlasting Covenant was established in Jesus Christ through his Paschal Mystery—the saving mystery of his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

### Church

The People of God, whom God the Father has called together in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible reveals that God has called a people together to be his people and has entered into a solemn agreement, called the **Covenant**, with them. The biblical account of the Covenant is the story of the solemn agreement between God and his people in which they mutually committed themselves to each other.

## The Covenant in the Old Testament

The story of the Covenant begins at creation. It continues with the Covenant God made with Noah and all humanity (see Genesis 3:14–16, 9:9–17) and with the Covenant God entered into with Abraham, promising that Abraham would be the father of a great people. (See Genesis 12:1–3.)

In dramatic fashion, God brought Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, out of slavery from Egypt, led them through the desert, and entered into the Covenant with them at Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb. (See Exodus 19:4–6.) In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites what God has done for them by gathering them together as the People of God. Moses tells the people:

*“There was the day on which you stood before the LORD, your God, at Horeb. . . . He proclaimed to you his covenant, which he commanded you to keep.”*

DEUTERONOMY 4:10, 13

From that day forward, the Israelites, or Jewish people, have regularly gathered together to renew their commitment to live the Covenant by obeying the Commandments God gave them.



*Moses with the Ten Commandments.*  
Domenic Mastrojanni, twentieth-century Italian painter.

## The New and Everlasting Covenant

The early **Church** recognized that the same God who gathered the Israelites to be his people had now called them to be his people in a new Covenant. The beginning, or salutation, of many of the New Testament letters of Saint Paul speaks to the nature of the Church as the people called together by God in Christ. In the salutation of the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2



*St. Paul Preaching at the Areopagus, detail from wool tapestry. Raphael (1483–1520), Italian painter and architect.*

The writers of the New Testament often use the Greek word *ekklesia* to name the people whom God has gathered in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is true God and true man. They gave this Greek word, which originally referred to any convocation, gathering, or assembly of people, a new and unique meaning.

The word *ekklesia* specifically described their identity as the Church. The Church is the People of God whom God the Father has called together in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ dwells within the Church, rules over her, and continues to work through her.

**How do Paul's words describe the Church?**

### **lifelinks**

***In a small group discuss how God works through the people of your parish. List your thoughts. Then describe a parish activity in which you could participate with others.***

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# The Body of Christ

## DOCTRINE FOCUS

*What is the role of the assembly of the faithful at liturgy?*

## Faith vocabulary

### liturgy

The participation of the People of God in the “work of God”—the work of the whole Church, of Christ the Head of the Church, and of the members of the Body of Christ through which Christ continues the work of Redemption.

When immigrants apply for and receive citizenship in the United States of America, they acquire the identity of those citizens. This newly acquired identity brings with it many rights and responsibilities. How citizens do or do not exercise those rights and fulfill those responsibilities affects America and all her people.

## A Holy Nation, A Royal Priesthood

The First Letter of Peter recognizes that all those baptized into Christ constitute a group that has a unique identity. We read, “You are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of [God’s] own’” (1 Peter 2:9). Reflecting on this passage, the Church has come to understand that we worship God as a people whom God the Father has gathered together in Christ. At the Second Vatican Council, the bishops taught that when the assembly of the baptized faithful gathers for the **liturgy**, Christ is with them:

Christ is *always present in his Church* [emphasis added] especially in her liturgical celebrations. . . . He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister . . . but especially in the eucharistic species. . . . He is present in his word. . . . Lastly he is present when the church prays and sings. . . .”

THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY [SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM] 7

It is with Christ and through Christ and in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit that the faithful offer honor and glory to the Father as one people. God the Father is adored as the source of all the blessings of creation and salvation with which he has blessed us in his Son so we may become his adopted children.



## The Assembly of the Faithful

On the day of your Confirmation, the Church will gather around the bishop or the priest delegated by him. The bishop, the priests of your parish and your catechist, your family and sponsor, the other ministers and the assembly will gather and join with you. Confirmation, of course, would be validly administered if only the bishop, or the priest delegated by him,



were there to confirm you. They represent the Church and act in the name and Person of Christ. The bishop is a successor of the Apostles and, in communion with the Pope, governs the Church.

The simple presence of the assembly, however, is not enough. It is not only important that we gather for the liturgy but also how we gather. The Church reminds us that “in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions . . . and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 11).

Everyone will join in prayer, asking that the Holy Spirit be poured out on you. The place where you gather will be filled with believers, as Mary and the disciples filled the Upper Room on Pentecost.

***Why is it important that the assembly of the faithful gather to participate in your Confirmation?***

### LITURGY LINK

In the Order of the Latin Mass celebrated after the Council of Trent, the first line began with the words *Sacerdos paratus* (“When the priest is ready”). In the revised Order of the Mass approved for use after the Second Vatican Council, those opening words were changed to *Populo congregato* (“When the people have gathered”). This change in the revised Order of the Mass signals the vital role the assembly of the faithful has whenever the Eucharist and other sacraments are celebrated.

### LIFELINKS

***In a small group discuss the attitudes of mind and heart that a person needs to bring to the celebration of the liturgy. In this space record the list generated by your group.***

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# The Church Gathers

## RITUAL FOCUS

*Why is the assembly present at the Sacrament of Confirmation?*

## Faith vocabulary

### Body of Christ

An image for the Church used by Saint Paul the Apostle that teaches that all the members of the Church are one in Christ, the Head of the Church, and that all members have a unique and vital work in the Church.

### sacrament

An "efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1131).

Some things that we do come so naturally that we are often not even aware of how significant these actions really are. For example, when some families pray grace before meals, family members may spontaneously join hands as a way of expressing their union in prayer. By that simple action the members of the family are saying, "This is who we are."

## Gathering as the Body of Christ

There are many ritual actions that we use to celebrate the liturgy that come so naturally we often do not stop and think about their deeper meaning. One of those actions is when the Church assembles for liturgy. We do not gather on our own initiative. We respond to God's invitation. It is God who calls the assembly into being and it is the Holy Spirit who builds and sanctifies the Church.

In his letters Saint Paul reflected on the significance of the ritual actions of the Church and admonished Christians to be aware of their significance. For example, Saint Paul taught that the Church is the **Body of Christ** (see 1 Corinthians 12:12–31) and he admonished the Church in Corinth about the inappropriate and irreverent ways they were gathering and celebrating the Eucharist. Their behavior revealed that they had forgotten who they were and what they were celebrating. (See 1 Corinthians 11:17–34.)

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. She is both visible and spiritual, both human and divine. There is a profound unity that binds Christ and all the members of the Body of Christ, the Church. All the members of the Church are one in Christ, the Head of the Church.

Saint Paul preaching in Corinth, stone sculpture.





The celebration of the **Sacrament** of Confirmation begins with the gathering of the assembly of the faithful after which the Introductory Rites of the Mass begin. The *Rite of Confirmation* states: “When the candidates, their sponsors and parents, and the whole

assembly of the faithful have gathered, the bishop [walks in procession] to the sanctuary with the priests who assist him, one or more deacons, and the ministers. Meanwhile all may sing a psalm or appropriate song” (Rite of Confirmation 34).

This directive, or rubric, for celebrating Confirmation reminds us that every celebration of the liturgy is “meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 7, 27.) We join with Christ, the one, eternal, high Priest, who is the main celebrant of the liturgy. With him, we offer the prayers of the liturgy as the priestly People of God.

Your family and friends, and many members of your parish, will come together to celebrate with you on the day of your Confirmation. That gathering of the Church will be a sign that the Body of Christ, the priestly People of God, is present in a special way.

**What does the gathering of the worshipping assembly signify?**

## LITURGY LINK

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) describes the purpose of the Introductory Rites of the Mass as being “to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily” (GIRM 46).

## lifelinks

**In a small group discuss what you observe when people of your parish gather together for worship on Sunday. Describe what you see that tells about their understanding of themselves as the Body of Christ.**

**What I See**

**What It Says**

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# The Church

## LIVES the Faith

Wonderful things can happen when people gather for a good purpose. For example, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s embraced a nonviolent philosophy. Its members relied heavily on the power of people gathering together to bear witness to the equal dignity of all people, to work against injustice, and to seek change within society and within the minds and hearts of Americans. Change began to happen as the size of those gatherings grew. More and more citizens began to take notice and take part in the movement.



### Encounter the Gospel of Life

The Church also knows a great deal about the power of people gathering together and the difference that the power of such gatherings can make. In the late 1990s, a handful of youth ministers in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., dreamed of gathering youth and adults from various parishes to learn, reflect on, and put into practice Catholic Social Teaching. At first this gathering was held during a summertime weeklong “service camp.” This gathering, known as Encounter the Gospel of Life, has grown to become a year-round process of formation and transformation. Hundreds of young people, their parents, and adults involved in youth ministry take part.



## Following Christ's Command

The heart of the Encounter the Gospel of Life gathering is an intensive week of service with people in the Washington, D.C., area who are living in poverty or who experience needs in other ways. Soup kitchens, homes for the elderly, inner-city children's programs, and many other settings provide the opportunity, not only for doing Works of

Mercy as Christ commanded in Matthew 25:31-46 and John 13:34-35, but just as importantly, for putting a human face on sisters and brothers in need.

## Living the Gospel in Daily Life

An exuberant atmosphere of learning about the connections between such good works and Catholic Social Teaching fills early morning prayer, afternoon conversations, and evening formation sessions. Songs, skits, dancing, witness talks, and many other engaging ways of exploring faith keep the camp participants focused and excited about what they are learning.

Discovering the connections between the Eucharist and action for justice is one of the valuable outcomes that regularly characterizes the experience of both young and old alike.

Encounter the Gospel of Life is much more than a simple opportunity to lend a helping hand. It is a call to conversion. It is an invitation to a deepened faith and to a more intentional way of living the Gospel in daily life. You can learn more about Encounter the Gospel of Life at their Web site: [www.eglweb.org](http://www.eglweb.org).

***What gatherings of Christians can you name that make a difference in our world today? Describe how each gathering makes a difference by putting the Gospel into action.***



# Living the Faith

## Makes a Difference



Teens gather in a variety of ways. They spend their time in a variety of ways. How teens gather and how they spend their time reveals a great deal about them and makes a difference in their lives.

### Spending Time with Friends

Researchers who study human growth and development have for a long time observed the tremendous influence that teens have on one another—especially those who “hang out” regularly with one another. While the movement of teens from spending time with families to spending more time with friend-centered groups, or peer groups, can sometimes be a source of distress and anxiety to parents, it is both a normal and essential developmental step for young people.

The growing role of peer groups in your life can be a blessing or a risk, depending on the values and behaviors that the friends you spend time with reinforce. Who you hang out with is part of your forming an identity as an independent person. Think about the friends with whom you regularly gather. The people with whom you regularly spend time can tell a great deal about who you think you are and what values you live by.

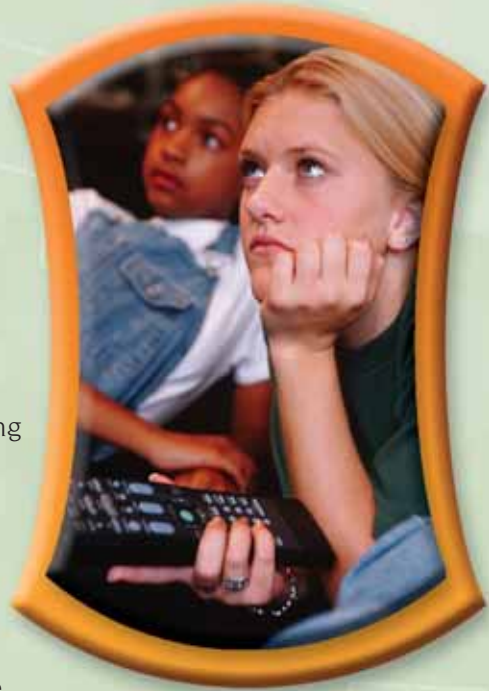


## Spending Time Doing . . .

Researchers also study trends in how young people spend their time. One research study polled more than 2,500 teens and young adults. Research showed that in an average week, twelve- to twenty-four-year-old Americans spend 16.7 hours online, 13.6 hours watching television, 12 hours listening to the radio, 7.7 hours talking on the phone, and 6 hours reading books and magazines.

Such studies often come up with fascinating statistics. But for someone who wishes to be known as a disciple of Jesus Christ, these numbers call us to evaluate how we spend our time. Who do you enjoy hanging out with most? How much time do we spend with Christ? Where do you invest your time and energy in a given week? How much time do we consciously choose to live the Gospel?

Researchers often ask young people to keep a detailed diary of how they spend their time each day over a period of a week or two. What might such a diary tell you about yourself as a disciple of Jesus? About your priorities and your values and how they are based on the Gospel? What would your diary reveal about the role that faith plays in your life?



## Faith Decision

- In a small group brainstorm the activities that you think teens spend their time doing.
- Once your group has developed its list, create two columns on a piece of paper. In one column write what you think is the average amount of time teens actually spend on each activity. In the other column write the amount of time that you think a responsible Christian teen might spend on that activity.

This week I will keep a personal log each day of how much time I spend living my faith. After reviewing my time log, I will

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