

EXPLORING

Our Catholic Faith

A Spiritual Guide for Believers and Seekers

Theme 11

The Church

*"I believe in the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins."*

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–6

A Believer Asks . . .

- When I profess my faith and say, "I believe in the Church," what do I mean?
- How do I understand the word *Church*?
- What gives me a sense of belonging to the Catholic Church?

Sources

- Catechism of the Catholic Church §§ 748–962
- Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church §§ 147–199
- United States Catholic Catechism for Adults pages 111–139

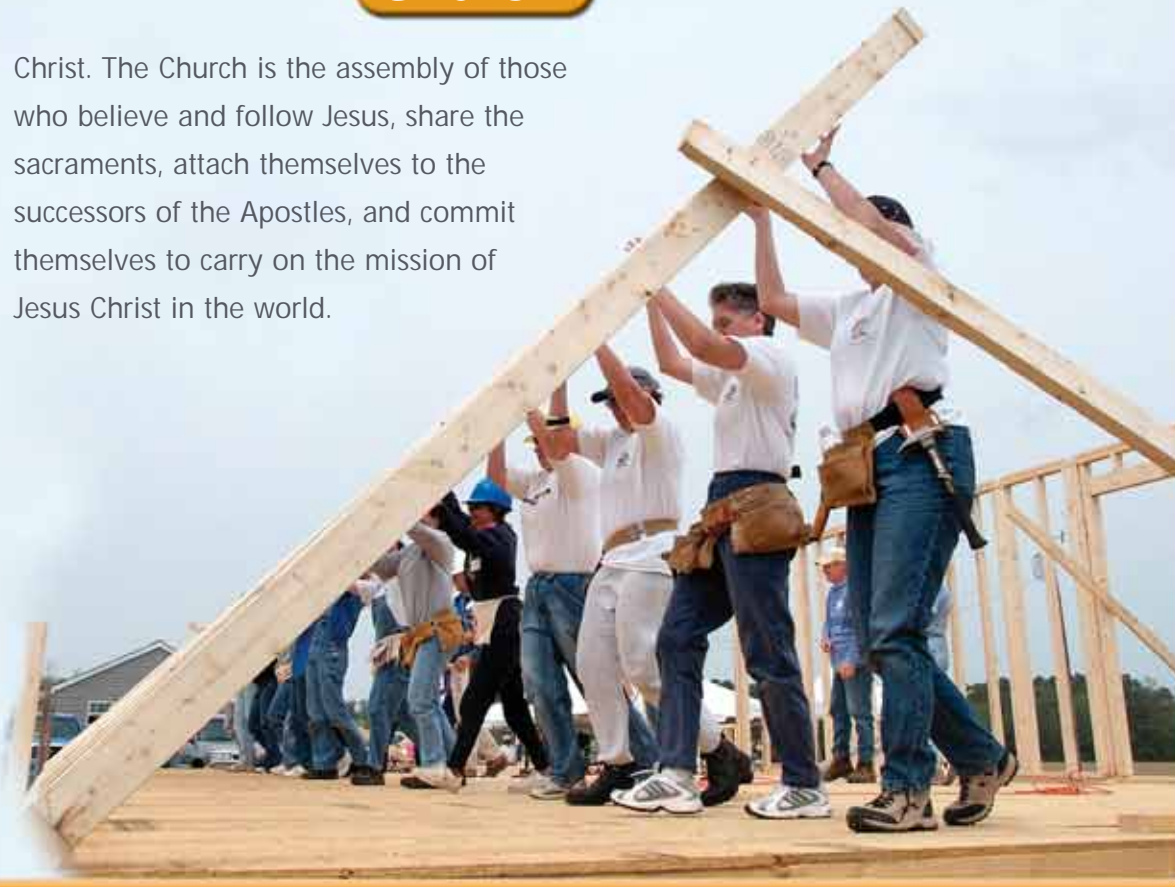
Understanding the Words of Faith . . .

Church

The word *church* stirs up many associations for people. Some think of church buildings, while others think of an institution or organization. Still others think of a group of like-minded people.

When we profess our faith and say that we “believe in the Church,” we attach a very specific meaning to the word. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. It means the assembly of those whom God has called out (*ek-kallein*) from the world to be gathered into the people of God and the Body of

Christ. The Church is the assembly of those who believe and follow Jesus, share the sacraments, attach themselves to the successors of the Apostles, and commit themselves to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.



Understanding the Reality of Faith . . .

The mystery of the Church

The Church is a mystery not just in the sense that it is difficult to understand. It is a mystery because only faith can grasp its complex reality. The Church is not reducible to something that human intelligence can figure out.

It is a complex reality that is both human and divine, visible and spiritual, holy by God’s grace and populated by sinful people always in need of forgiveness and conversion. It is a reality that belongs to this world as well as heaven. These realities of the Church come together when we say, “I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.”

How does this understanding of Church compare with my responses on the previous page?



A Person of Faith



Understanding How Catholics Believe . . .

*No Church without Christ,
no Christ without the Church*

Our essential access to Jesus Christ is through his Church, which is his body. Through the tradition of the Apostles, which is continued through the ministry of the Pope and bishops, we are assured of faithfully receiving and knowing the teachings of Jesus. Through the sacraments celebrated by and for the Church, the saving mysteries of Christ are made present and available to us. Through its visible and structured presence in the world, the Church is a great sign among the nations and an enduring witness to Jesus Christ.

What examples can I give of ways in which the Church stands as an enduring witness of Christ in the world?

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and the Church

Thérèse of Lisieux lived at the end of the nineteenth century, at the time as a young and obscure cloistered Carmelite nun. She seemed to be cut off from the world and even the mainstream of public church life. In her brief life (she died at twenty-four), she discovered her vocation to be love in the heart of the Church. This powerful identification with the Body of Christ in a spirit of complete self surrender has reverberated ever since in the life of the Church. She knew and lived her profession of faith, “I believe in the holy Catholic Church.”

A Believer Reflects . . .

The Church contains much diversity in its life. Certainly, there is a diversity of language, culture, and ways of life. At a deeper level, there is a diversity of gifts (charisms), offices, ministries, and ways of growing in holiness. At the same time, there is an underlying unity in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How can I identify in my experience the great diversity and unity of the Church to which I belong?

A Believer Makes a Difference . . .

What gifts has God given me that could be put at the service of the Church? Of my parish?

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Nihil Obstat
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Censor Deputatus
December 8, 2006

Imprimatur
Reverend John F. Canary, STL, DMin
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Archdiocese of Chicago
December 11, 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Believers Pray . . .

Psalm 84

Reader: A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians.
Proclaim Ephesians 1:15–23.
The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD.

All: Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

Leader: Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

All: Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

Leader: For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.

All: Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

Leader: No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

All: Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

PSALM 84:1–2A, 3–4, 10, 11B–12

Leader: Lord God, you call us to be your Church.
May we always be aware that we live
in your presence, one God who is
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.