

**THE CHURCH – THE BODY OF CHRIST
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE BODY OF CHRIST..... 3
 INTRODUCTION 3
 FORMATION..... 3
 FUNCTION..... 5
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS 6

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And He put all things beneath His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Eph. 1:22-23 NABRE

“The word ‘Church’ means ‘convocation’. It designates the assembly of those whom God's word ‘convokes’ i.e. gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.777

It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of “the law of Christ.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.2030

“The unity in Christ of all the redeemed, those on earth and those who have died. ... all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and His saints is always {attentive} to our prayers.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.962

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thess. 4:14,

THE BODY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

In revealing Himself to mankind, God promised to form the Patriarchs and their progeny into a great nation.¹ Mankind's faith response to God's self revelation is to gather as a community of believers praising God. God invites each of us into a personal relationship of faith, hope and love, but within the context of a community of believers. God formed the people of Israel to be His own and on their journey to salvation strengthened them through blessings and trials.² God also promised His chosen people that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed.³ That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Jesus inaugurates the Church on earth by preaching the Good News of salvation and told His followers that He was the way to the Father.⁴ He gathered apostles and disciples around Him and taught them a new way of life. The apostles with Peter as their head⁵ were sent forth to preach and teach about the Kingdom of God, and form a community of believers in the name of Jesus. The Church is born as a result of Jesus' total self-giving on the cross, His death and Resurrection, for our salvation. We believe that it is in and through the Church that the saving work of Christ continues in the here and now, and in every time and place⁶

Salvation comes from God alone. But we receive the new life of faith from the Church, our "mother and teacher in faith."⁷ The Catholic Church is a universal (catholic) institution that is primarily a community of love, grounded in faith in Jesus Christ and inspired by the hope of eternal life. It is a visible institution and a spiritual community. The Church, the People of God (descendants of Abraham in faith), forms the Body of Christ; the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ, and through the Holy Spirit, is the temple of the living God.⁸

FORMATION

1. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son Jesus Christ, in human form, born of the Virgin Mary,⁹ to lead us to salvation and spend eternal life with God in Heaven. "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures. To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The Church "is the reign of Christ already present in

¹ Gen. 12:2 (NABRE)

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.761-762).

³ Gen. 12:3

⁴ Jn. 14:6

⁵ Mt. 16:18

⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.763-766).

⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.169).

⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.789); 2 Cor 6:16

⁹ Lk. 1:26-38

mystery.”¹⁰

2. Jesus suffered and died for our sins and, through His Suffering, Death and Resurrection, reconciled us with the God the Father.¹¹ The first community was formed in Jerusalem after Jesus Christ ascended into heaven¹² and the Catholic Church came into being when the Holy Spirit filled the Apostles and enabled them to boldly proclaim the Good News of salvation at Pentecost.¹³ God forms a community of believers who become the visible image of Divine Love.
3. Jesus had previously made Peter the head of the Church, “*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*”¹⁴ This leadership role has been handed down through Apostolic Succession to each Pope since that time. The Church is therefore sustained by Jesus Christ through the workings of the Holy Spirit¹⁵ and will sustain until the end of time.
4. The Church is both human and divine and it is through the Church that Christ communicates truth and grace to all men,¹⁶ and brings all men to eternal salvation.¹⁷ The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ This joint mission henceforth brings Christ’s faithful to share in His communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prepares men and goes out to them with His grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls His word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of His Death and Resurrection. He makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to bring them into communion with God, that they may “bear much fruit.”¹⁹
5. The comparison of the Church with the human body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and His Church. Not only is she gathered around Him; she is united in Him, in His body. Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ.²⁰
6. Jesus told His disciples, “*I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I*

¹⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.763).

¹¹ Jn. 3:16-17

¹² Acts 1:13-14

¹³ Acts 2:1-4

¹⁴ Mt. 16:18

¹⁵ Acts 1:8

¹⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.771).

¹⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.763).

¹⁸ 1 Cor 6:19

¹⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.737); Jn. 15:16

²⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.789).

in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing."²¹ The Body of Christ cannot sustain without "remaining" in Jesus, and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help us remain in Him.²² Each of us is a part of the Body²³ forming the Church, established by Christ, guided by the Spirit as long as we remain in the Spirit, to do God's will here on Earth and in Heaven.

7. It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals His own mystery and in Him, "*We have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of His grace that He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, He has made known to us the mystery of His will in accord with His favor that He (God) set forth in Him (Christ) as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.*"²⁴
8. "Christ is the light of humanity...the Church has no other light than Christ's; according to a favorite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun."²⁵
9. We are essentially social beings. The human response to God's revelation in faith draws us into a community of believers. For God invites each of us into a personal relationship of faith, hope and love in the context of a community of believers. We need one another to understand and grow in our relationship with God. To accept the gift of faith is to be united to God, the giver of all gifts and to all those who accept that same gift.²⁶
10. The Church is a visible society and a spiritual community, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ, with its members joined in spiritual communion. She is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.²⁷

FUNCTION

11. Jesus Christ was foreordained by God as prophet, priest and king. We receive a share in the priestly vocation through our faith and baptism. "*Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*"²⁸ We share in the prophetic office of Christ through the faith of the Church.
12. We are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world. We share in the royal office of Christ through His death and resurrection when he drew all men to Himself. Christ, King and Lord of the universe, made himself the servant of all, for he came "*not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom*

²¹ Jn. 15:5

²² 1 Jn. 4:13

²³ 1 Cor 12:27

²⁴ Eph. 1:7-10

²⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.748).

²⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.738).

²⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.779).

²⁸ 1 Pet. 2:5

for many.”²⁹ Therefore we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus.³⁰

13. The Church gathers disciples from “every nation, race, people, and tongue”³¹ and through her liturgical celebrations Christ’s work of salvation is effected. Sacred Scripture tells us that we are, “*A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may announce the praises*” of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.³²
14. Salvation comes from God alone; but because we receive the life of faith through the Church, she is our mother: “We believe the Church as the mother of our new birth, and not in the Church as if she were the author of our salvation.” Because she is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith.³³
15. Christ enables us to live in Him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. “By his Incarnation, He, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man.” We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what He lived for us in his flesh as our model.³⁴
16. We, the People of God, are all baptized and fully incorporated into the Body of Christ through grace, the Sacraments, our profession of faith, and are in union with the Bishops of the Church, united to the Pope, the successor to Peter.³⁵
17. The People of God are the “Messianic” people and are called to live in dignity and freedom because the Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts. We are to “*love one another*” as Jesus loves us.³⁶ We are to be “the salt of the earth,” and “the light of the world.”³⁷

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

18. The Church is a “communion of saints;” this expression refers first to, above all, the Eucharist by which “the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both represented and brought about.”³⁸
19. The term “communion of saints” refers also to the communion of “holy persons” in Christ who “died for all,” so that what each one does or suffers in and for Christ bears fruit for

²⁹ Mt. 20:28

³⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.783-786, 871); Mk. 8:34

³¹ Rev. 7:9

³² 1 Pet. 2:9

³³ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.169).

³⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.521).

³⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.782, 869).

³⁶ Jn. 13:34

³⁷ Mt. 5:13-16

³⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.960); LG 3

all.³⁹

20. “We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified in purgatory, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and His saints is always [attentive] to our prayers.”⁴⁰
21. “It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself.”⁴¹
22. “In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and ‘because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins’ she offers her suffrages for them.” Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.⁴²
23. In imitation of His own Resurrection, we are promised, with the faithful, our own resurrection;

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*⁴³

KEY POINTS

- ❖ The Church is the “sacrament of salvation,” which is to say that the Church is the “sign and instrument” of our union with God and of our union with one another.⁴⁴
- ❖ The Church is the “visible plan of God’s love for humanity. The Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ. She is one, yet formed of

³⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.961).

⁴⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.962); Paul VI, CPG § 30

⁴¹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.957, 1173); Eph. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:19, 22

⁴² Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.958).

⁴³ 1 Thess. 4:13-18

⁴⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.774).

two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.”⁴⁵

- ❖ We are members of the People of God by faith and baptism. In our common faith in Jesus Christ we form “one family and one People of God – a priestly, prophetic and royal people.”⁴⁶
- ❖ The Church is the Body of Christ. In the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist “Jesus Christ, once dead and now risen, establishes the community of believers as his own Body.” In this one Body of Christ, there is a diversity of members, functions and gifts. Christ is the head of His Body, the Church.⁴⁷
- ❖ The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit is the source of the Church’s life, of her unity in diversity, and of the riches of gifts and graces given to the faithful through the Church.⁴⁸
- ❖ By daily imitating the example of Jesus the faithful are called to holiness of life. The “Universal Call to Holiness” is addressed to all the members of the Church – laity, clergy and religious.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.775, 776, 779).

⁴⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.781-786).

⁴⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.787-796). CCC 787 – 796

⁴⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.797).

⁴⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.800).