

The Church is also apostolic in that the deposit of faith found in both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition was preserved, taught, and handed on by the apostles. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Magisterium (the teaching authority entrusted to the apostles and their successors) has the duty to preserve, teach, defend, and hand on the deposit of faith. Moreover, the Holy Spirit protects the Church from error in its teaching authority. While over the course of time, the Magisterium has had to address current issues, such as nuclear war, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, the same truth principles exercised under the guidance of the Holy Spirit prevail.

These four marks of the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic — are fully realized in the Catholic Church. While other Christian Churches accept and profess the Creed, and possess elements of truth and sanctification, only the Roman Catholic Church reflects the fullness of these marks. The Second Vatican Council taught, "This Church [which Christ founded], constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #8), and "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help towards salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (Decree on Ecumenism, #3). Our duty then is to make these four marks visible in our daily lives.

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**Pamphlet 145**

## **The Four Marks of the Church**

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In the Nicene Creed, we profess, "We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church": these are the four marks of the Church. They are inseparable and intrinsically linked to each other. Our Lord Himself in founding the Church marked it with these characteristics, which reflect its essential features and mission. Through the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church fulfills these marks.

First, the Church is one. The Catechism notes that the Church is one for three reasons: first, because of its source, which is the Holy Trinity, a perfect unity of three divine persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; second, because of its founder, Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile all mankind through the blood of the cross; and third, because of its "soul," the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the souls of the faithful, who unites all of the faithful into one communion of believers, and who guides the Church (#813).

The "oneness" of the Church is also visible. As Catholics, we are united in our Creed and our other teachings, the celebration of the sacraments, and the hierarchical structure based on the apostolic succession preserved and handed on through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. For example, whether one attends Mass in Alexandria, San Francisco,

Moscow, Mexico City, or wherever, the Mass is the same — the same readings, structure, prayers, and the like except for a difference in language — celebrated by the faithful who share the same Catholic beliefs, and offered by a priest who is united to his bishop who is united to the Holy Father, the pope, the successor of St. Peter.

In our oneness, we do find diversity: The faithful bear witness to many different vocations and many different gifts, but work together to continue the mission of our Lord. The various cultures and traditions enrich our Church in their expressions of one faith. In all, charity must permeate the Church, for it is through charity that the members are bound together and work together in harmonious unity.

The Church is also holy. Our Lord Himself is the source of all holiness: "The one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in His body which is the Church" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #14). Christ sanctifies the Church, and in turn, through Him and with Him, the Church is His agent of sanctification. Through the ministry of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit, our Lord pours forth abundant graces, especially through the sacraments. Therefore, through its teaching, prayer and worship, and good works, the Church is a visible sign of holiness.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that each of us as a member of the Church has been called to holiness. Through baptism, we have been freed from original sin, filled with

sanctifying grace, plunged into the mystery of our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, and incorporated into the Church, "the holy people of God." By God's grace, we strive for holiness. The Second Vatican Council exhorted, "Every Catholic must therefore aim at Christian perfection and, each according to his station, play his part, that the Church, which bears in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus, may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to Himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle" (Decree on Ecumenism, #4).

Our Church has been marked by outstanding examples of holiness in the lives of the saints of every age. No matter how dark the times may have been for our Church, there have always been those great saints through whom the light of Christ radiated. Yes, we are frail human beings, and at times we sin; yet, we repent of that sin and continue once again on the path of holiness. In a sense, our Church is a Church of sinners, not of the self-righteous or self-assured saved. One of the beautiful prayers of the Mass occurs before the Sign of Peace: "Lord, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church." Even though poor frail individual members of the Church fail and sin, the Church continues to be the sign and instrument of holiness.

The Church is also catholic. St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 100) used this word meaning "universal" to describe the Church (Letter to the Smyrnaens). The Church is indeed Catholic in that Christ is universally present

in the Church and that He has commissioned the Church to evangelize the world — "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Moreover, we must not forget that the Church here on earth — what we call the Church militant — is united to the Church triumphant in Heaven and the Church suffering in Purgatory. Here is the understanding of the communion of saints — the union of the faithful in Heaven, in Purgatory, and on earth.

Finally, the Church is apostolic. Christ founded the Church and entrusted His authority to His apostles, the first bishops. He entrusted a special authority to St. Peter, the first Pope and Bishop of Rome, to act as His vicar here on earth. This authority has been handed down through the Sacrament of Holy Orders in what we call apostolic succession from bishop to bishop, and then by extension to priests and deacons. If possible, Bishop Loverde could trace his apostolic succession as a bishop back to one of the apostles. When Bishop Loverde ordained seven men as priests for our diocese on May 15, he did so with the authority of apostolic succession, and those men in turn share in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. No bishop, priest, or deacon in our Church is self-ordained or self-proclaimed; rather, he is called by the Church and ordained into the apostolic ministry given by our Lord to His Church to be exercised in union with the Pope.