

# Article 9: "I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church"

## Paragraph 1. The Church in God's Plan

### Names and Images of the Church

CCC 751: The word "**Church**" (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-kalein*, to "*call out of*") means a convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself "**Church**," the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is "calling together" his people from all the ends of the earth. The equivalent Greek term *Kyriak*, from which the English word Church and the German Kirche are derived, means "*what belongs to the Lord*."

CCC 752: In Christian usage, the word "*church*" designates the **liturgical assembly**, but also the **local community** or the whole **universal community** of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. "**The Church**" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body.

CCC 753: Symbols of the Church: In Scripture, we find a host of interrelated images and figures through which Revelation speaks of the inexhaustible mystery of the Church. The images taken from the Old Testament are variations on a profound theme: the People of God. In the New Testament, all these images find a new center because Christ has become the head of this people, which henceforth is his Body. Around this center are grouped images taken "from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage."

1. **Sheepfold** (gateway to Christ, Good Shepherd, John 10:1-10) 2. **Cultivated Field** (Vineyard)

3. **Building of God** (Heavenly Jerusalem, Temple of God) 4. **Our Holy Mother** 5. **Spouse of Christ**

### The Church's Origin, Foundation, and Mission

#### The Mystery of the Church

CCC 770: The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only "with the eyes of faith" that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life.

CCC 771: *The Church—both visible and spiritual*

"The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men." The Church is at the same time: ■ a "society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ; ■ the visible society and the spiritual community; ■ the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches." . . .

**St Bernard of Clairvaux:** *O humility! O sublimity! Both tabernacle of cedar and sanctuary of God; earthly dwelling and celestial palace; house of clay and royal hall; body of death and temple of light; and at last both object of scorn to the proud and bride of Christ! She is black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, for even if the labor and pain of her long exile may have discolored her, yet heaven's beauty has adorned her.*

#### The Church—mystery of man's union with God

CCC 772: It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: "to unite all things in him." St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church "a great mystery." Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn. Contemplating this mystery in her, Paul exclaims: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

CCC 773: In the Church this communion of men with God, in the "love [that] never ends," is the purpose which governs everything in her that is a sacramental means, tied to this passing world. "[The Church's] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the 'great mystery' in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom." Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church's mystery as "the bride without spot or wrinkle." This is why the "Marian" dimension of the Church precedes the "Petrine."

### IN BRIEF

## **Paragraph 2. The Church—People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit**

### **The Church—People of God**

CCC 781: *"At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him. He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it. He gradually instructed this people. . . . All these things, however, happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ . . . the New Covenant in his blood; he called together a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit."*

CCC 782: **Characteristics of the People of God** The People of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, ethnic, political, or cultural groups found in history:

- It is the People of God: God is not the property of any one people. But he acquired a people for himself from those who previously were not a people: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."
- One becomes a member of this people not by a physical birth, but by being "born anew," a birth "of water and the Spirit," that is, by faith in Christ, and Baptism.
- This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is "the messianic people."
- "The status of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple."
- "Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us." This is the "new" law of the Holy Spirit. – St Augustine said "Love and do what you will." This new law, love, didn't do away with the Ten Commandments, it fulfilled them.
- Its mission is to be salt of the earth and light of the world. This people is "a most sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race."
- Its destiny, finally, "is the Kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it has been brought to perfection by him at the end of time."

CCC 783: **A priestly, prophetic, and royal people** Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king. The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them.

CCC 784: On entering the People of God through faith and Baptism, one receives a share in this people's unique, priestly vocation: "Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men, has made this new people 'a kingdom of priests to God, his Father.' The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood."

CCC 785: "The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office," above all in the supernatural sense of faith that belongs to the whole People, lay and clergy, when it "unfailingly adheres to this faith . . . once for all delivered to the saints," and when it deepens its understanding and becomes Christ's witness in the midst of this world.

CCC 786: Finally, the People of God shares in the royal office of Christ. He exercises his kingship by drawing all men to himself through his death and Resurrection. 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 for many." For the Christian, "to reign is to serve him," particularly when serving "the poor and the suffering, in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder." The People of God fulfills its royal dignity by a life in keeping with its vocation to serve with Christ.

**St Leo the Great:** *"The sign of the cross makes kings of all those reborn in Christ and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests, so that, apart from the particular service of our ministry, all spiritual and rational Christians are recognized as members of this royal race and sharers in Christ's priestly office. What, indeed, is as royal for a soul as to govern the body in obedience to God? And what is as priestly as to dedicate a pure conscience to the Lord and to offer the spotless offerings of devotion on the altar of the heart?"*

### **The Church—Body of Christ**

### **The Church Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit**

### **IN BRIEF**