

# Gifts of Finest Wheat

Fall 2009 - Ecclesiology

October 8, 2009

Session 2 – Origin and Nature of the Church; Images of the Church; “Complex Reality”

- Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
*V.* Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.  
**R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.**  
*Let us pray.*  
**O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.**
- Questions from last time?
- Our goal this evening: a further understanding of the nature of the Church based on images of the Church from Scripture and Tradition. This will inevitably be a continuation of last week's themes.
- A preliminary note: Pope Benedict on the interpretation of scripture and “the internal continuity of the Church's memory” – Called to Communion page 19-20
- Purpose of *Lumen Gentium*
  - To bring the light of Christ to all men
  - To unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission (LG 1)
- Origins of the Church
  - Trinitarian
    - Ontological origin rather than historical origin
    - The Church, like all God's work, is a work of the Holy Trinity. See LG 1, 2, and 3.
    - The communion within the Church mirrors the unity of the Trinity; Mission within the Church mirrors the eternal begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit
    - Rooted in the Father's eternal will to raise humanity up to share in His divine life.

- The gathering together of God’s people is in a sense God’s response to the chaos of sin born of our first parents
    - “The Family of God is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history” (CCC 759).
    - The Church is a people made one with the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
  - Christological
    - The article of faith about the Church depends entirely on the articles concerning Christ Jesus (CCC 748). The Church is likened to the moon, reflecting the light of Christ.
    - Church is inaugurated by Christ through preaching the Good News of the Kingdom; The Church is the reign of Christ already present in mystery.
    - Part of the establishment of the Kingdom is the gathering and purifying of the community of the end times. The “soon” of the Kingdom becomes “now” in Christ.
    - The Church is the “seed and beginning” of the Kingdom
    - The Church is prepared and built through all Christ’s actions, particularly his total self-giving on the cross. This is carried out in the Eucharist in which our union with God and each other is both expressed and effected.
    - Christ gives His new People a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved (CCC 765)
  - Pneumatological
    - The Church and Pentecost
    - Seen in the image of the body of Christ and temple of God
- New People of God
  - The image from the OT, of which other images are a “variation on a profound theme”
  - God has 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...” (LG 9)
  - “Once you were ‘no people,’ but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2:10)
  - The people of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, social, political, cultural groups. Cf. CCC 782.
  - Our responsibility is to become what we are: to be molded in the likeness of Christ until he is formed in us.
  - “The institution of the most holy Eucharist on the evening before the Passion cannot be regarded as some more or less isolated cultic transaction. It is the making of a covenant and, as such, is the concrete foundation of the new

people: the people comes into being through its covenant relation to God” (B-16 page 28).

- “The Eucharist, seen as the permanent origin and center of the Church, joins all the many, who are now made a people, to the one Lord and to his only Body” (B-16 page 29).
- Our share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ
  - “The entire body of the faithful...cannot err in matters of belief.” – The whole people’s supernatural discernment in matters of the faith (LG 12). The indefectibility of the Church.
  - Perfection in holiness
  - The ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful: differ not only in degree, but in essence.
- Historical Images of the Church
  - Why images? The Church is an inexhaustible divine mystery (Cf LG 6)
  - Noah’s Ark
    - St John Chrysostom: “The ark cannot suffer shipwreck, because it has the Lord of all at its helm. The Church is therefore like the ark and Noah symbolizes Christ, and the dove the Holy Spirit. And just as the ark saves those within her amidst the waves of the sea, so also the Church saves all who are going astray.”
    - St. Thomas Aquinas: “No one ought to be indifferent to the Church, or allow himself to be cut off and expelled from it; for there is one Church in which men are saved, just as outside the ark of Noah no one could be saved.”
  - Israel/Jerusalem
    - The choice of the 12
    - Home to the Temple and ark of the covenant
      - The Heavenly Jerusalem
        - “As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort.” (Isaiah 66:13)
        - “I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).
  - Jacob’s Ladder (Gen 28:10-18)
    - St. Augustine: Jacob’s ladder represented the Church, the angels and patriarchs ascending and descending represent the evangelists; those who ascended into heaven contemplate the beauty of Christ and then descend again to give spiritual milk to the children in Christ.

- The ladder and the Church as the “Channel” or means of attaining communion with God
    - Jacob called the place “Bethel” (house of God)
- Natural Images of the Church
  - Sheepfold
    - The only and necessary gateway is Christ; God himself foretold that He would be the shepherd
    - Led and nourished by Christ
    - The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 10)
  - Field
    - Planted by God
    - “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building” (1 Cor 3:6-9).
    - Vine and branches (Jn 15)
  - Building/Temple
    - Christ is the cornerstone (Mt 21:42)
    - Built on the foundation of the apostles (1 Cor 3:11)
    - As living stones, we are built into it
      - “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22).
    - The Spirit dwells in this temple (1 Cor 6:19-20)
    - This image has the beginnings of a hierarchical understanding of the Church
    - The house of God has familial tones (1 Tim 3:15)
      - The family as the “domestic church” (LG 11)
- Mystical Body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18)
  - “Corporate personality”
  - See B-16 page 37 on “communion.”
  - Because Christ has become the head of His people, this image becomes a central one
  - An image of **intimate communion** with Christ; closely related to John’s image of the vine and branches

- The Eucharist: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in Him.”
- “In the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about” (LG 3).
- “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:16-17).
- “By communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation” (CCC 788).
- What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Church. (St. Augustine)
- “We see that in a man there are soul and one body; and of his body there are many members. So also the Catholic Church is one body and has different members. The soul which animates this body is the Holy Spirit” (St. Thomas Aquinas)
- We are not simply gathered around Christ, we are united in Him.
- This oneness of members is the impetus for charity among those same members.
- This unity overcomes all human divisions (Gal 3:28)
- Though united, the members of the body maintain their diversity of functions (1 Cor 12:12-27)
- Since Christ is the head of this body, “we are taken up into the mysteries of his life, associated with his sufferings with it’s head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified” (CCC 793) (Romans 6:1-4)
- Christ and the Church: The “whole Christ.”
- Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-33)
  - Adds to the mystical body image a distinction of the two within a personal relationship.
  - “In their indissoluble spiritual-bodily union, they nonetheless remain unconfused and unmingled” (B-16 page 39)
  - Marital imagery suggests an everlasting covenant as well as a tender, unending love
  - The Church becomes the fruitful mother of all God’s children
    - “No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother” (St. Cyprian)
  - The Eucharist: The one flesh consummation of the covenant
  - In relation to the unicity of the Church

- “The Church must constantly become what she is through unitive love and resist the temptation to fall from her vocation into the infidelity of self-willed autonomy” (B-16 page 39-40). – The Christ-Church relationship is also the model for the husband-wife reality
- Related image: the Church as the Family of God
  - “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).
- The Church: Complex Reality
  - The Church is “a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men” (CCC 771)
  - “One complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element” (LG 8) These are not to be considered two realities
  - The Church is essentially both human and divine
  - By no weak analogy, the Church is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word.
  - Faithful to our human nature – The merely invisible we can accept on his authority. But He has given us a visible Church, with recognizable rules and laws and doctrines and means of sanctification, in which man is at home.
  - All creation is hierarchical – we should not be surprised that the Church would follow this divine pattern
  - Ecclesial communion is both visible and invisible
    - More than a mere feeling of community or belonging
    - Church is not a celebration of ‘togetherness’ of the people, but rather a gathering of His people by God
  - The will of the Founder supersedes the ‘needs’ of the members. The communion within the Church is an ontological one, not a moral one.
  - The visible structure of the Church is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members; Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church’s mystery. “That is why the ‘Marian’ dimension of the Church precedes the ‘Petrine’” (CCC 773).
  - The Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation
    - *Sacramentum* translates the Greek *mysterion*. (Eph 5:32)
    - *Sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of a hidden reality of salvation
    - Christ himself is the “mystery of salvation.”
    - The Church, in a way, prolongs the humanity of Christ visible on Earth.
    - The Church contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies; the Church is the sign and instrument of communion with God and among humans

- *Ex opera operato* – the Church is efficacious despite the weakness of her human members and holy despite their sinfulness
  - The Church is intended for all – God’s love for all humanity; in this sense she is called the “Universal Sacrament of Salvation”
- The Church as Institutional and Charismatic
  - What are charisms?
  - “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes” (1 Cor 12:4-11).
  - Relation to the hierarchical Church; never in opposition
- Questions?
- Announcements
  - Materials available
  - Reading for next time
  - Lolek tickets available
  - March for life info
  - Sunday night talks – “The Catholic Difference”
- Closing prayer – From the Book of Blessings