

# What is the Church?

October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010

RCIA Session 6

God the Father → Jesus the Word → Apostles

Deposit of the faith →

1) Writing (Scripture)

2) Oral (Tradition)

→ The Church (Apostolic Succession)

- People of God
  - From the foundation of the world → Communion with God
  - Covenant
  - The people of Israel
  - The new People of God
- The Body of Christ
  - In Paul
  - God's people united *in* Him; drawing their life from their head
  - Intimate union
- The Church as visible and invisible
  - An analogy to Christ
  - Mystical body/hierarchical organs
  - The "sacramentality" of the Church
- Founded by Christ
  - Matthew 16:18-19 (Esp. 18) – See below
- The Role of the Magisterium
  - Who is the Magisterium? The Bishops in union with the Pope. The teaching office of the Church.
  - Why a teaching authority? – So we may have a sure guide to know with certainty the message of Christ, that which is true and good.
  - Biblical
    - John 16:12-13 - "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, **he will guide you to all truth.** He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.
    - Luke 10:16 – "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."
    - 1 Tim 3:15 - But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, **which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.**
    - 2 Tim 2:2 - And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.
    - Acts 15
  - Patristic (Early Church writers)

### **Pope Clement I**

"Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. . . . Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (*Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4–5, 44:1–3 [A.D. 80]).

### **Irenaeus**

"It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:1 [A.D. 189]).

"Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time" (*ibid.*, 3:3:4).

"Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth, so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. . . . For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant conversation, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?" (*ibid.*, 3:4:1).

"[I]t is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father." (*ibid.*, 4:26:2).

"The true knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession of bishops, by which succession the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere" (*ibid.*, 4:33:8).

### **Tertullian**

"[The apostles] founded churches in every city, from which all the other churches, one after

another, derived the tradition of the faith, and the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive Church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all [spring]. In this way, all are primitive, and all are apostolic, while they are all proved to be one in unity" (*Demurrer Against the Heretics* 20 [A.D. 200]).

- Infallibility of the Magisterium
  - Ecumenical Councils – remember the early Church deciding about the nature of Christ and the canon of the Bible
  - Individual Bishops/priests - no
- The Pope
  - The Primacy of Peter in scripture
    - Peter often speaks for the other apostles (Mt 19:27; Mk 8:29; Lk 12:41)
    - The apostles are sometimes referred to as “Peter and his companions.” (Lk 9:32; Mk 16:7; Acts 2:37)
    - Peter’s name always leads the lists of apostles; Judas Iscariot always takes up the rear
    - Matthew 10:2 – “These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew...”
      - The Greek for “first” is *Protos*
      - Was Peter the first apostle chronologically???
    - Peter’s name is mentioned 191 times in the NT, more than all the rest of the apostles put together
  - Matthew 16:17-19 - Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. 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. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**"
    - **KEYS image**
    - **(Isaiah 22)**
  - Luke 22:31-32 - "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; **and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.**"
  - John 21:15-17 - When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "**Feed my lambs.**" He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "**Tend my sheep.**" He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, "**Feed my sheep.**"
  - Patristic

## **Pope Clement I**

"Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we must acknowledge that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute among you, beloved; and especially that abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have inflamed to such madness that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be loved by all men, has been greatly defamed. . . . Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . If anyone disobey the things which have been said by him [God] through us [i.e., that you must reinstate your leaders], let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger. . . . You will afford us joy and gladness if being obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy" (*Letter to the Corinthians* 1, 58–59, 63 [A.D. 80]).

### **Ignatius of Antioch**

"Ignatius . . . to the church also which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after the Father" (*Letter to the Romans* 1:1 [A.D. 110]).

"You [the church at Rome] have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force" (*ibid.*, 3:1).

### **Irenaeus**

"But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [A.D. 189]).

### **Eusebius of Caesarea**

"A question of no small importance arose at that time [A.D. 190]. For the parishes of all Asia [Minor], as from an older tradition held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Savior's Passover. . . . But it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world . . . as they observed the practice which, from apostolic tradition, has prevailed to the present time, of terminating the fast [of Lent] on no other day than on that of the resurrection of the Savior [Sunday]. Synods and assemblies of bishops were held on this account, and all, with one consent, through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other but the Lord's day and that we should observe the close of the

paschal fast on this day only. . . . Thereupon [Pope] Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the community the parishes of all Asia [Minor], with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox. And he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate. But this did not please all the bishops, and they besought him to consider the things of peace and of neighborly unity and love. . . . [Irenaeus] fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom" (*Church History* 5:23:1–24:11).

Cyprian of Carthage

"The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven' [Matt. 16:18–19]. ... On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep [John 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair [*cathedra*], and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were also what Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all [the apostles] are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

#### Church History/Development

- Infallibility
  - Follows from many of the scriptures we have looked at, as well as Christ's promise that he could lead the Church into all truth.
  - There was a gradual understanding of and acceptance of this reality in the Church, especially in the East.
  - Vatican I - Infallibility defined
    - "We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks EX CATHEDRA, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable" (*Pastor Aeternus*, 9)
  - Conditions for Papal Infallibility
    - The pronouncement must be made by a lawful successor of Peter – in other words, a pope.

- The subject matter of the declaration must be in the area of faith or morals. It doesn't fall within the pontiff's ability to make infallible declarations on science, economics, history, etc.
- The pope must be speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, officially, from the office of Peter. In this way, he must be specifically intending to proclaim a doctrine, binding the Church to its assent.
- And this infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as the deposit of Revelation extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded (LG 25).
- Not impeccability
- Examples
  - Immaculate Conception
  - Assumption
- Claims of the Church → Response