

## **I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.**

After professing our faith in God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creed now moves to the definition of what we believe as a Church.

When His visible presence was taken from the apostles, Jesus did not leave them orphans. He promised to remain with them until the end of time and He sent them His Spirit to begin the work of His Church. We find this recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus said, “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.” (Matthew 16:18-19). Jesus made Peter the “rock” on which He would build His Church. And, from that time on, Peter, and his successors, would be recognized as the Head and Shepherds of the Church.

We call the Church the “Body of Christ.” This shows the intimate bond between Jesus and His Church. We, the members of the Church, form His living body. We also refer to the Church as the “Bride of Christ.” This makes sense since Jesus gave His whole life for her, just as a wife and husband give themselves to each other. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians says this so beautifully: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed Himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”(Ephes. 5:25-27).

In the Creed, we profess that we believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We call these the four “marks” of the Church. Let’s review each of them in detail.

**One Church** – In contemporary America we are confronted with the reality that there are many “churches” in existence. I heard the other day that there are over 30,000 expressions of Christianity. Despite this, it is an article of Catholic faith that there is only one Church of Jesus Christ – the Church that He founded on Peter and the Apostles. So, what does this say about the other Christian communities that exist in our world? The Catholic Church specifically refers to non-Catholic bodies as ecclesial communities. This is intentional to make the point that there is only one Church.

Despite what St. Paul tells us that there is “One Body,” our experience says this is not so. There is no longer unity in the Church. And, without going into a detailed analysis of the history of this division, let’s just say that up until the thirteenth century almost all Christians were united in one Catholic Church. While other Christian communities have varying degrees of unity with the Catholic Church, none of them have a worldwide organizational unity (worship, belief and leadership), as does the Catholic Church. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has made great strides in trying to restore unity among Christians and we must

continue to pray for this unity because that is what Christ intended for His Church. His prayer was that we might all be united in Him.

**Holy Church** – By His Grace, Jesus makes the Church holy, just as He is holy. The Church is holy because she is the source of holiness and she is the guardian of the special means of grace Jesus established, the sacraments. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Holy and He has called us to holiness in Him, through His Body, the Church. We are called into fellowship with Him through the community of believers, by the Sacraments, by the preaching of the Gospel message, by praying and being prayed for, and by forgiving and being forgiven.

The Church is holy in her origin, her purpose, her means, and the results she produces. She is holy in origin, since she was founded by Christ and given the Holy Spirit. The Church is also holy in her purpose, which is to glorify God and sanctify His people. The means used to attain holiness are also present in the Church: the Word of God in the Bible, the Ten Commandments, and the sacraments, especially the Sacrifice of the Mass at which we receive Christ's own Body and Blood. The Church is also holy in the results she produces. She is known from the holiness of those men and women throughout history who have made full use of the graces given through the Church's ministry – the saints who have gone before us and those still walking among us. The Church, therefore, is not only holy in herself, but she also produces holy men and women. Does this mean that all of the members of the Church are holy? No, the Church is not a just a home for saints; it is also a hospital for sinners. The Church is always in need of reform.

**Catholic Church** – The third mark of the Church is that she must be Catholic, which means "universal." Some people ask when the word Catholic started to be used. That's a good question. From what we can gather, it was first used in reference to the Church by St. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, in the year 108 AD. "'Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he ordains [i.e. a priest]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.'" The Church is "Catholic" because the same Gospel is to be preached everywhere and at all times. For almost 2000 years, the Catholic Church has carried out this mission, preaching the good news that Christ died for all and that He wants all of us to be members of His universal family. The Church has both an internal and an external dimension of catholicity. Externally, she is a unified body of believers that derives her foundation from Christ and is located throughout the world. Internally, she is endowed with all the supernatural means (gospel, grace and the sacraments) to bring about the salvation of all people at all times in every land.

**Apostolic Church** – The fourth and final mark of our Church is that it is Apostolic. This basically means the identity everywhere and since the time of her foundation remains united with the Apostles in an unbroken line. Thus, the Church has remained faithful to what the Apostles founded and passed down to their successors, the bishops. It follows from this that our Church has a rock solid foundation, since Christ is the cornerstone. St. Paul confirms this

in his Letter to the Ephesians, as he says that the Church was “built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20).

The apostolic nature of the Church is displayed in three ways: **(1) apostolic origin** – the Church was founded by Christ on the Apostles and through them; **(2) apostolic doctrine** – the identity of faith that was preached by the Apostles; **(3) apostolic succession** – the “uninterrupted” chain of bishops who link the Church of the apostles with the Church today. The Catholic Church possesses, in the person of the Holy Father, the power of the keys that our Lord promised to St. Peter (Matthew 16:18). Pope Benedict XVI is the 265<sup>th</sup> successor to St. Peter. Pretty incredible! Any church that ordains ministers outside of Apostolic Succession must admit that this vital link has been broken. We must ask: Who has the authority to ordain, except those to whom it has been given? And to whom did Jesus first give that authority – the Apostles. It is necessary that the Church be Apostolic so that we can be sure that it is the same Church that Jesus established in the first century with the apostles as the first bishops.

The Second Vatican Council taught that the fullness of truth “subsists” in the Catholic Church. This is not to say that other Christian communities do not contain truths of the faith, but they do not possess the fullness of Christ’s teachings as revealed in the Catholic Church. This does not mean that we should not associate or work with other faiths? But it also does not mean that we should consider all communities the same. That would be compromising what we profess in our Creed. Occasionally, someone will say, “Well, it’s okay that so and so doesn’t practice Catholicism anymore.” That is not true.

After reflecting on the four marks of the Catholic Church and their significance, we discover that they are not just some hidden characteristics we might speculate about; they are external, recognizable marks of Christ’s Church. That should be proof enough to believe in Christ’s presence today – alive and active in the Church! In his letter to Timothy, St. Paul calls the Church the “pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

### **I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins**

We all know what Baptism is, but it might be good to recall some of the truths associated with this sacrament. Baptism is closely associated with the life of Jesus on earth. He received the Baptism of John (Matthew 3:13-17) and He often spoke of Baptism as a “new birth” which would be necessary if one wishes to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:1-5). He also commanded his Apostles to go into the whole world and baptize all nations (Matthew 28:19). The effect of Baptism is a “new birth” for the human person into the supernatural life of grace. By this rebirth a Christian takes on a new mode of being in the world. He/she becomes a spiritual person; he/she is incorporated into the life of the Church; he/she is washed clean from all sins – original sin and all personal sins. It is because of this we say in the Creed “we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” What we are saying is that Baptism imprints on the soul of a person an permanent mark – called the baptismal

“character” – and thus it cannot be repeated. That is why we do not “re-baptize” folks from another Christian faith when they decide to join the Catholic Church (There are some exceptions to this rule).

**and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.**  
**Amen.**

The resurrection of the dead professed in our Creed will take place at the end of the world – a time unknown to anyone except the Father (Mark 13:32) - when this whole world as we know it will be transformed into something completely new. That is the moment when Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, referred to as the Parousia. What kind of life will this be? WE know it will be one of supreme joy and happiness for those who have died in the love of God. A point to stress is that the joy of those saved not only affects the soul, but the whole person – body and soul. We believe that at the resurrection the body will be reunited with the soul. It is a defined teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council that all the dead will rise with the same body they had on earth, both those in heaven and those in hell. However, since all matter in our physical bodies changes throughout the years, we will not have the same exact look that we had in this life, but we will look similar and retain our sexual identity. This again shows the Catholic teaching concerning the dignity of the human person – body and soul. Our bodies are not merely shells for us to flee.

The Creed concludes with a strong note of hope concerning eternal life. From our own experience we know what life is – supreme good, something we strive to preserve at all costs. From personal death, we hope to inherit everlasting life. By His own suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus defeated the bonds of sin and death and opened for those who believe in Him the gates to eternal life. Our Catholic faith teaches that our lives do not end with death. When God created each person, He intended for us to share His abundant life in heaven. However, in order to attain the perfect life He has in store for us, He demands that we freely love Him in return. That is how we ultimately receive the gift of eternal life – by loving God with all our hearts, souls, and strength.

**Why is it so important that we understand the Creed we profess every Sunday?**

This is so important because it is these truths that bind us together as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. And when we stray from these truths, we destroy the unity of the Church and fail to live Christ’s words: “That all may be one” (John 17:11). The Creed should give us an ever-greater appreciation for our Catholic faith and the fact that, for almost 2000 years, people have literally given their lives to defend this Church. The Creed should also have a direct effect on our spiritual lives and the way that we carry out our mission to serve God in this world. It is a constant reminder that, if we are faithful to God and love Him above all things, we will enjoy the eternal life He has prepared for us.