



WHY DOES GOD WANT US TO BE PART OF A CHURCH? HOW DOES THAT WORK?



GOSPEL



ANSWERS

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: 15-20

SAINTS & INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

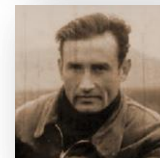
CELESTINA BOTTEGO

Celestina shows us that it does not matter how young or old you are – we are all called to build up and be active members of the Church. Celestina's commitment to the poor and the needy was intense and heartfelt. Her relationship with God and the Church was faithful and dedicated.



BLESSED VLADMIR GHIKO

Vladmir lived an interesting and diverse life as a Romanian diplomat and later as a Catholic priest. He was not only proud of his Catholic faith, but he fought to spread it and help others. This cost him his life at the hands of the communists.



TEAM DISCUSSION

After reading over the YOUCAT numbers on the following pages, how do you think the Youth Catechism answers the question of the week? Were there any words or ideas that you did not fully understand that you would like to understand better?

ANSWER IN YOUR OWN WORDS:



YOUCAT NUMBERS FOR THIS WEEK



CHURCH (FROM THE GREEK KYRIAKE = BELONGING TO THE LORD): consists of those called together from all nations (from Greek ex kaleo, ekklesia) who through Baptism belong to the Body of Christ.

#122 WHY DOES GOD WANT THERE TO BE A CHURCH?

God wills the Church because he wants to redeem us, not individually, but together. He wants to make all mankind his people. No one gets to heaven by the asocial route. Someone who thinks only about himself and the salvation of his own soul is living a-socially. That is impossible both in heaven and on earth. God himself is not a-social; he is not a solitary, self-sufficient being. The Triune God in himself is "social", a communion, an eternal exchange of love. Patterned after God, man also is designed for relationship, exchange, sharing, and love. We are responsible for one another.

#123 WHAT IS THE TASK OF THE CHURCH?

The Church's task is to make the kingdom of God, which has already begun with Jesus, germinate and grow in all nations. Wherever Jesus went, heaven touched earth: the kingdom of God was inaugurated, a kingdom of peace and justice. The Church serves this kingdom of God. She is not an end in herself. She must carry on what Jesus started. She should act as Jesus would act. She continues the sacred signs of Jesus (the sacraments). She hands on Jesus' words. That is why the Church, for all her weakness, is a formidable bit of heaven on earth.

#133 WHY IS THE CHURCH CALLED CATHOLIC?

"Catholic" (Greek kat' holon) means related to the whole. The Church is catholic because Christ called her to profess the whole faith, to preserve all the sacraments, to administer them and proclaim the Good News to all; and he sent her to all nations.

#121 WHAT DOES "CHURCH" MEAN? The Greek word for Church is "ekklesia" = those who are called forth. All of us who are baptized and believe in God are called forth by the Lord. Together we are the Church. Christ is, as Paul says, the Head of the Church. We are his body. When we receive the sacraments and hear God's Word, Christ is in us and we are in him—that is the Church. The intimate communion of life with Jesus that is shared personally by all the baptized is described in Sacred Scripture by a wealth of images: Here it speaks about the People of God and in another passage about the Bride of Christ; now the Church is called Mother, and again she is God's family, or she is compared with a wedding feast. Never is the Church a mere institution, never just the "official Church" that we could do without. We will be upset by the mistakes and defects in the Church, but we can never distance ourselves from her, because God has made an irrevocable decision to love her and does not forsake her despite all the sins of her members. The Church is God's presence among us men. That is why we must love her.



#346 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH, AND HOW BINDING ARE THEY?

The "Five Precepts of the Church" with their minimum requirements are supposed to remind us that one cannot be a Christian without making a moral effort, without participating personally in the sacramental life of the Church, and without union with her in solidarity. They are obligatory for every Catholic Christian.

HOLINESS

The most essential attribute of God.

#126 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH IS THE "BODY OF CHRIST"?

Above all through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, an inseparable union comes about between Jesus Christ and Christians. The union is so strong that it joins him and us like the head and members of a human body and makes us one.

#134 WHO BELONGS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH? Anyone who, in union with the Pope and the bishops, is united to Jesus Christ through profession of the Catholic faith and reception of the sacraments is in full communion with the Catholic Church. God willed one Church for all. Unfortunately we Christians have been unfaithful to this wish of Christ. Nevertheless, even today we are still deeply united with one another by our faith and common Baptism.

#124 WHY IS THE CHURCH MORE THAN AN INSTITUTION?

The Church is more than an institution because she is a mystery that is simultaneously human and divine. True love does not blind a person but rather makes him see. With regard to the Church, this is precisely the case: Viewed from outside, the Church is only a historical institution with historical achievements, but also mistakes and even crimes—a Church of sinners. But that is not looking deep enough. After all, Christ became so involved with us sinners that he never abandons his Church, even if we were to betray him daily. This inseparable union of the human and the divine, of sin and grace, is the mystery of the Church. Seen with the eyes of faith, the Church is therefore indestructibly holy.

#125 WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

The founder of this people is God the Father. Its leader is Jesus Christ. Its source of strength is the Holy Spirit. The entryway to the People of God is Baptism. Its dignity is the freedom of the children of God. Its law is love. If this people remains faithful to God and seeks first the kingdom of God, it changes the world. In the midst of all the peoples on earth, there is one people that is like no other. It is subject to no one but God alone. It is supposed to be like salt, which adds flavor; like yeast, which permeates everything; like light, which drives away the darkness. Anyone who belongs to the People of God must count on coming into conflict with people who deny God's existence and disregard his commandments. In the freedom of the children of God, however, we have nothing to fear, not even death.

#127 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH IS THE "BRIDE OF CHRIST"?

Jesus Christ loves the Church as a bridegroom loves his bride. He binds himself to her forever and gives his life for her. Anyone who has ever been in love has some idea of what love is. Jesus knows it and calls himself a bridegroom who lovingly and longingly courts his bride and desires to celebrate the feast of love with her. We are his Bride, the Church. In the Old Testament God's love for his people is compared to the love between husband and wife. If Jesus seeks the love of each one of us, how often is he then unhappily in love—that is to say, with all those who want nothing to do with his love and do not reciprocate it?!



CONQUEST WEEKLY ACTIVITY GUIDE



#128 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH IS THE "TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"?

The Church is the place in the world where the Holy Spirit is completely present. The people of Israel worshipped God in the Temple of Jerusalem. This temple no longer exists. It has been replaced by the Church, which is not limited to a particular place. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). What makes her alive is the Spirit of Christ: He lives in the Word of Sacred Scripture and is present in the sacred signs of the sacraments. He loves in the hearts of believers and speaks in their prayers. He leads them and bestows charisms on them—simple gifts as well as extraordinary ones. Anyone who enters into a relationship with the Holy Spirit can experience true miracles even today.

#129 WHY CAN THERE BE ONLY ONE CHURCH?

Just as there is only one Christ, there can be only one Body of Christ, only one Bride of Christ, and therefore only one Church of Jesus Christ. He is the Head, the Church is the Body. Together they form the "whole Christ" (St. Augustine). Just as the body has many members yet is one, so too the one Church consists of and is made up of many particular churches (dioceses). Together they form the whole Christ. Jesus built his Church on the foundation of the Apostles. This foundation supports her to this day. The faith of the apostles was handed down from generation to generation under the leadership of the Pope, the Petrine ministry, "which presides in charity" (St. Ignatius of Antioch). The sacraments too, which Jesus entrusted to the apostolic college, still work with their original power.

#130 ARE NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS ALSO?

All baptized persons belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. That is why also those Christians who find themselves separated from the full communion of the Catholic Church are rightly called Christians and are therefore our sisters and brothers. Instances of separation from the one Church of Christ came about through falsifications of Christ's teaching, human failings, and a lack of willingness to be reconciled—usually on the part of representatives on both sides. Christians today are in no way guilty for the historical divisions of the Church. The Holy Spirit also works for the salvation of mankind in the churches and ecclesial communities that are separated from the Catholic Church. All of the gifts present there, for example, Sacred Scripture, sacraments, faith, hope, love, and other charisms, come originally from Christ. Where the Spirit of Christ lives, there is an inner dynamic leading toward "reunion", because what belongs together wants to grow together.

#131 WHAT MUST WE DO FOR THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS?

In word and deed we must obey Christ, who expressly wills "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). Christian unity is the business of all Christians, regardless of how young or old they are. Unity was one of Jesus' most important concerns. He prayed to the Father, "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). Divisions are like wounds on the Body of Christ; they hurt and fester. Divisions lead to enmities and weaken the faith and credibility of Christians. Overcoming the scandal of separation requires the conversion of all concerned but also knowledge of one's own faith convictions, dialogues with others, and especially prayer in common, and collaboration among Christians in serving mankind. Those in authority in the Church must not let the theological dialogue be interrupted.



CHURCHES & ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

Many Christian communities on earth call themselves churches. According to the Catholic understanding, only those in which the sacraments of Jesus Christ have been preserved in their entirety have remained "Church". This is true especially of the Orthodox and Eastern Churches. In the "ecclesial communities" that resulted from the Protestant Reformation, all the sacraments have not been preserved.

ECUMENISM (from Greek oikumene = the inhabited earth,) efforts to unify divided Christians.

#132 WHY IS THE CHURCH HOLY? The Church is holy, not because all her members are supposedly holy, but rather because God is holy and is at work in her. All the members of the Church are sanctified by Baptism. Whenever we allow ourselves to be touched by the Triune God, we grow in love and become holy and whole. The saints are lovers—not because they are able to love so well, but because God has touched them. They pass on the love they have received from God to other people in their own, often original way. Once God takes them home, they also sanctify the Church, because they "spend their heaven" supporting us on our path to holiness.

#217 WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CHURCH WHEN SHE CELEBRATES THE EUCHARIST? Every time the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she stands before the source from which she herself constantly springs anew. By "eating" the Body of Christ, the Church becomes the Body of Christ, which is just another name for the Church. In the sacrifice of Christ, who gives himself to us, body and soul, there is room for our whole life. We can unite everything—our work and our sufferings, our joys—with Christ's sacrifice. If we offer ourselves in this way, we are transformed: We become pleasing to God and like good, nourishing bread for our fellowmen. Again and again we grumble about the Church, as though she were just an association of more or less good people. In reality the Church is what happens daily in a mysterious way at the altar. God gives himself to each one of us individually, and he wants to transform us through Communion with him. Once we are transformed, we are supposed to transform the world. Everything else that the Church is besides that is secondary.

#136 HOW DOES THE CHURCH VIEW OTHER RELIGIONS? The Church respects everything in other religions that is good and true. She respects and promotes freedom of religion as a human right. Yet she knows that Jesus Christ is the sole redeemer of all mankind. He alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life". Whoever seeks God is close to us Christians. There is a special degree of "affinity" to the Muslims. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is one of the monotheistic religions (Monotheism). The Muslims, too, revere God the Creator and Abraham as their father in faith. Jesus is considered a great prophet in the Qur'an; Mary, his Mother, as the mother of a prophet. The Church teaches that all men who by no fault of their own do not know Christ and his Church but sincerely seek God and follow the voice of their conscience can attain eternal salvation. However, anyone who has recognized that Jesus Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" but is unwilling to follow him cannot find salvation by other paths. This is what is meant by the saying, outside of the Church there is no salvation.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION (Latin successio = sequence, appointment of a replacement): the unbroken series of bishops since the apostles, their successors in the episcopal ministry. As Jesus conferred his authority on his apostles, so it is passed on since then from bishop to bishop through the imposition of hands and prayer.



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CLERGY

:ordained men in the Church.

TWELVE APOSTLES (Greek apostolos = someone sent, messenger): Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew; James, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (Mt 10:2-4).

#135 WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS? Jews are the "older brethren" of Christians, because God loved them first and spoke to them first. Jesus Christ as man is a Jew, and this fact unites us. The Church recognizes in him the Son of the living God, and this fact separates us. In awaiting the final coming of the Messiah we are one. The Jewish faith is the root of our faith. The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, which we call the Old Testament, is the first part of our Sacred Scripture. The Judeo-Christian concept of man and morality, which is informed by the Ten Commandments, is the foundation of Western democracies. It is shameful that for hundreds of years Christians were unwilling to admit this close relation to Judaism and for pseudo-theological reasons helped foment an anti-Semitism that all too often had lethal effects.

#137 WHY IS THE CHURCH CALLED APOSTOLIC? The Church is called apostolic because she was founded by the apostles, holds fast to their Tradition, and is governed by their successors. Jesus called the apostles to be his closest collaborators. They were his eyewitnesses. After his Resurrection, he appeared to them repeatedly. He bestowed on them the Holy Spirit and sent them as his authoritative messengers to all the world. They assured unity in the early Church. They conferred their mission and authority upon their successors, the bishops, through the laying on of hands. This process is called Apostolic Succession.

#138 HOW IS THE ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH STRUCTURED? In the Church there are the laity and clerics (clergy). As children of God, they are of equal dignity. They have equally important but different tasks. The mission of the laity is to direct the whole world toward the kingdom of God. In addition, there are the ordained ministers (clerics), who have the duties of ecclesiastical governance, teaching, and sanctification. In both states of life, there are Christians who place themselves at God's disposal in a special way through celibacy, poverty, and obedience (for example, consecrated religious). Every Christian has the duty to bear witness to the Gospel by his own life. But God walks a special path with each person. Some he sends as laymen, so that they might build up the kingdom of God by their family and occupation in the midst of the world. For this purpose, he bestows on them in Baptism and confirmation all the necessary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Others he entrusts with the pastoral ministry; they are to govern, teach, and sanctify his people. No one can take this duty upon himself; the Lord himself must send him on his way with his divine power through Holy Orders, so that he can act in the place of Christ and administer the sacraments.

#139 WHAT IS THE LAY VOCATION? The laity are sent to engage in society so that the kingdom of God can grow among men. A lay person is not a second-class Christian, for he shares in the priestly ministry of Christ (the universal priesthood). He sees to it that the people in his walk of life (in school, family and work) come to know the Gospel and learn to love Christ. Through his faith he leaves a mark on society, business, and politics. He supports the life of the Church, for instance, by becoming a lector or an extraordinary minister, by volunteering as a group leader, or by serving on church committees and councils (for example, the parish council or the board of directors of an institution). Young people especially should give serious thought to the question of what place God might want them to have in the Church.



#142 CAN BISHOPS ACT AND TEACH AGAINST THE POPE, OR THE POPE AGAINST THE BISHOPS?

Bishops cannot act and teach against the Pope, but only with him. In contrast, the Pope can make decisions in clearly defined cases even without the approval of the bishops. Of course the Pope in all his decisions is bound by the Church's faith. There is something like a general sense of the faith in the Church, a fundamental conviction in matters of faith that is brought about by the Holy Spirit and present throughout the Church, the Church's "common sense", so to speak, which recognizes "what has always and everywhere been believed by all".

POPE (FROM GREEK PAPPAS = FATHER): successor of the apostle Peter, Bishop of Rome.

BISHOP (from Greek episkopein = to supervise): successor of the apostles; leader of a diocese (local Church); as a member of the college of bishops, under the leadership of the Pope, the bishop has a share in the responsibility for the universal Church.

PRIEST (from Greek presbyteros = elder): co-worker with the bishop in proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments. He carries out his ministry in communion with the other priests, under the leadership of the bishop.

#140 WHY IS THE CHURCH NOT A DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION?

Democracy operates on the principle that all power comes from the people. In the Church, however, all power comes from Christ. That is why the Church has a hierarchical structure. At the same time, however, Christ gave her a collegial structure as well. The hierarchical element in the Church consists in the fact that Christ himself is the one who acts in the Church when ordained ministers, by God's grace, do or give something that they could not do or give by themselves, in other words, when they administer the sacraments in Christ's place and teach with his authority. The collegial element in the Church consists in the fact that Christ entrusted the entire faith to a group of twelve apostles, whose successors govern the Church, with the Pope, the Petrine ministry presiding. Given this collegial approach, councils are an indispensable part of the Church. Yet even in other administrative bodies of the Church, in synods and councils, the manifold gifts of the Spirit and the universality of the Church throughout the world can be fruitful.

#141 WHAT IS THE POPE'S RESPONSIBILITY?

As successor of St. Peter and head of the college of bishops, the Pope is the source and guarantor of the Church's unity. He has the supreme pastoral authority and the final authority in doctrinal and disciplinary decisions. Jesus gave Peter a unique position of preeminence among the apostles. This made him the supreme authority in the early Church. Rome—the Local Church that Peter led and the place of his martyrdom—became after his death the internal reference point of the young Church. Every Christian community had to agree with Rome; that was the standard for the true, complete, and unadulterated apostolic faith. To this day every Bishop of Rome has been, like Peter, the supreme shepherd of the Church, whose real Head is Christ. Only in this capacity is the Pope "Christ's Vicar on earth". As the highest pastoral and doctrinal authority, he watches over the transmission of the true faith. If need be, he must revoke commissions to teach doctrine or relieve ordained ministers of their office in cases of serious failures in matters of faith and morals. Unity in matters of faith and morals, which is guaranteed by the Church's Magisterium, or teaching authority, with the Pope at the head, is one reason for the remarkable resilience and influence of the Catholic Church.



#251 WHAT ARE THE DEGREES OF THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS? The sacrament of Holy Orders has three degrees: →BISHOP (episcopate), →PRIEST (presbyterate), →DEACON (diaconate).

#143 IS THE POPE REALLY INFALLIBLE? Yes. But the Pope speaks infallibly only when he defines a dogma in a solemn ecclesiastical act ("ex cathedra"), in other words, makes an authoritative decision in doctrinal questions of faith and morals. Magisterial decisions of the college of bishops in communion with the Pope also possess an infallible character, for example, decisions of an ecumenical council. The infallibility of the Pope has nothing to do with his moral integrity or his intelligence. What is infallible is actually the Church, for Jesus promised her the Holy Spirit, who keeps her in the truth and leads her ever deeper into it. When a truth of the faith that has been taken for granted is suddenly denied or misinterpreted, the Church must have one final voice that authoritatively says what is true and what is false. This is the voice of the Pope. As the successor of Peter and the first among the bishops, he has the authority to formulate the disputed truth according to the Church's Tradition of faith in such a way that it is presented to the faithful for all times as something "to be believed with certainty". We say then that the Pope defines a dogma. Therefore such a dogma can never contain something substantially "new". Very rarely is a dogma defined. The last time was in 1950.

#250 HOW DOES THE CHURCH UNDERSTAND THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS?

The priests of the Old Covenant saw their duty as mediating between heavenly and earthly things, between God and his people. Since Christ is the "one mediator between God and men", he perfected and ended that priesthood. After Christ there can be an ordained priesthood only in Christ, in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and through a calling and apostolic mission from Christ. A Catholic Priest who administers the sacraments acts not on the basis of his own power or moral perfection (which unfortunately he often lacks), but rather "in persona Christi". Through his ordination, the transforming, healing, saving power of Christ is grafted onto him. Because a priest has nothing of his own, he is above all a servant. The distinguishing characteristic of every authentic priest, therefore, is humble astonishment at his own vocation.

#258 WHY DOES THE CHURCH REQUIRE PRIESTS AND BISHOPS TO LIVE A CELIBATE LIFE?

Jesus lived as a celibate and in this way intended to show his undivided love for God the Father. To follow Jesus' way of life and to live in unmarried chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" has been since Jesus' time a sign of love, of undivided devotion to the Lord, and of a complete willingness to serve. The Roman Catholic Church requires this way of life of its bishops and priests, while the Eastern Catholic Churches demand it only of their bishops. Celibacy, says Pope Benedict, cannot mean "remaining empty in love, but rather must mean allowing oneself to be overcome by a passion for God". A Priest who lives as a celibate should be fruitful inasmuch as he represents the fatherly character of God and Jesus. The Pope goes on to say, "Christ needs priests who are mature and manly, capable of exercising a true spiritual fatherhood."

#344 WHY DOES THE CHURCH ALSO MAKE DECLARATIONS ABOUT ETHICAL QUESTIONS AND ABOUT MATTERS OF PERSONAL CONDUCT?

Believing is a path. One learns how to stay on this path, in other words, how to act rightly and to lead a good life, only by following the instructions in the Gospel. The teaching authority (magisterium) of the Church must remind people also about the demands of the natural moral law. There are not two truths. What is humanly right cannot be wrong from the Christian perspective. And what is right according to Christianity cannot be humanly wrong. That is why the Church must teach comprehensively about moral issues.



CONQUEST WEEKLY ACTIVITY GUIDE

#249 WHAT HAPPENS IN HOLY ORDERS? The man who is ordained receives a gift of the Holy Spirit that gives him a sacred authority that is conferred upon him by Christ through the bishop. Being a priest does not mean just assuming an office or a ministry. Through Holy Orders a priest receives as a gift a definite power and a mission for his brothers & sisters in faith.

#257 IS IT DEMEANING TO WOMEN THAT ONLY MEN MAY RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS? The rule that only men may receive Holy Orders in no way demeans women. In God's sight, man and woman have the same dignity, but they have different duties and Charisms. The Church sees herself as bound by the fact that Jesus chose men exclusively to be present at the Last Supper for the institution of the priesthood. Pope John Paul II declared in 1994 "that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful". Like no one else in antiquity, Jesus provocatively affirmed the value of women, bestowed his friendship on them, and protected them. Women were among his followers, and Jesus highly valued their faith. Moreover, the first witness to the Resurrection was a woman. That is why Mary Magdalene is called "the apostle of the apostles". Nevertheless, the ordained priesthood (and consequently pastoral ministry) has always been conferred on men. In male priests the Christian community was supposed to see a representation of Jesus Christ. Being a priest is a special service that also makes demands on a man in his gender-specific role as male and father. It is, however, not some form of masculine superiority over women. As we see in Mary, women play a role in the Church that is no less central than the masculine role, but it is feminine. Eve became the mother of all the living (Gen 3:20). As "mothers of all the living", women have special gifts and abilities. Without their sort of teaching, preaching, charity, spirituality, and guidance, the Church would be "paralyzed on one side". Whenever men in the Church use their priestly ministry as an instrument of power or do not allow opportunities to women, they offend against charity and the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

#259 HOW IS THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DIFFERENT FROM THE ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD? Through Baptism Christ has made us into a kingdom of "priests to his God and Father" (Rev 1:6). Through the universal priesthood, every Christian is called to work in the world in God's name and to bring blessings and grace to it. In the Upper Room during the Last Supper and when he commissioned the apostles, however, Christ equipped some with a sacred authority to serve the faithful; these ordained priests represent Christ as pastors (shepherds) of his people and as head of his Body, the Church. Using the same word, "PRIEST", for two related things that nevertheless "differ essentially and not only in degree" (Second Vatican Council, LG 10, 2) often leads to misunderstandings. On the one hand, we should observe with joy that all the baptized are "priests" because we live in Christ and share in everything he is and does. Why, then, do we not call down a permanent blessing on this world? On the other hand, we must rediscover God's gift to his Church, the ordained priests, who represent the Lord himself among us.

#345 WHAT ARE THE "FIVE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH"?

- (1) You shall attend Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation and abstain from work or activities that offend against the character of the day.
- (2) You shall receive the sacrament of Penance at least once a year.
- (3) You shall receive the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.
- (4) You shall observe the prescribed seasons of fasting and days of abstinence (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).
- (5) You shall contribute to the material support of the Church.



#253 HOW IMPORTANT FOR A CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN IS HIS BISHOP?

A Catholic Christian feels that he is under an obligation to his Bishop; the bishop is appointed for him, too, as Christ's representative. Moreover, the bishop, who exercises his pastoral ministry together with priests and deacons as his ordained assistants, is the visible principle and the foundation of the local Church (diocese).

#254 WHAT HAPPENS IN PRIESTLY ORDINATION?

In priestly ordination the Bishop calls down God's power upon the candidates for ordination. It imprints upon the souls of these men an indelible seal that can never be lost. As a collaborator with his bishop, the Priest will proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and, above all, celebrate the Holy Eucharist. During the celebration of a Holy Mass, the actual ordination of priests begins when the candidates are called by name. After the bishop's homily, the future priest promises obedience to the bishop and his successors. The actual ordination takes place through the imposition of the bishop's hands and his prayer.

#256 WHO CAN RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS?

A baptized, Catholic man who is called by the Church to be a deacon, priest, or Bishop can be validly ordained to that ministry.

#144 WHAT IS THE TASK OF THE BISHOPS?

Bishops have responsibility for the local Church that is entrusted to them and a share in the responsibility for the whole Church. They exercise their authority in communion with one another and for the benefit of the whole Church under the leadership of the Pope. Bishops must first of all be apostles—faithful witnesses of Jesus, who personally called them to follow him and then sent them. So they bring Christ to mankind and mankind to Christ. This happens through their preaching, the celebration of the sacraments, and their governance of the Church. As a successor of the apostles, a bishop exercises his ministry by virtue of his own apostolic authority; he is not an agent or a sort of assistant to the Pope. Yet he acts with and under the Pope.

#252 WHAT HAPPENS IN EPISCOPAL ORDINATION?

In episcopal ordination the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred upon a priest. He is ordained a successor of the apostles and enters the college of bishops. Together with the other bishops and the Pope, he is from now on responsible for the entire Church. In particular the Church appoints him to the offices of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. The episcopal ministry is the real pastoral ministry in the Church, for it goes back to the original witnesses to Jesus, the apostles, and continues the pastoral ministry of the apostles that was instituted by Christ. The Pope, too, is a Bishop, but the first among them and the head of the college.

#145 WHY DOES JESUS WANT THERE TO BE CHRISTIANS WHO LIVE THEIR WHOLE LIVES IN POVERTY, UNMARRIED CHASTITY, AND OBEDIENCE?

God is love. He longs for our love also. One form of loving surrender to God is to live as Jesus did—poor, chaste, and obedient. Someone who lives in this way has head, heart, and hands free for God and neighbor. In every age individual Christians let themselves be completely taken over by Jesus, so that "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12) they give everything away for God—even such wonderful gifts as their own property, self-determination, and married love. This life according to the Evangelical Counsels in poverty, Chastity, and obedience shows all Christians that the world is not everything. Only an encounter with the divine Bridegroom "face to face" will ultimately make a person happy.



DEACON The deacon (Greek diakonos = servant) is the first degree in the sacrament of Holy Orders in the Catholic Church.

#255 WHAT HAPPENS IN DIACONAL ORDINATION? In diaconal ordination the candidate is appointed to a special service within the sacrament of Holy Orders. For he represents Christ as the one who came, “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). In the liturgy of ordination we read: “As a minister of the Word, of the altar, and of charity, [the Deacon] will make himself a servant to all.” The original model of the deacon is the martyr St. Stephen. When the apostles in the original Church of Jerusalem saw that they were overwhelmed by their many charitable duties, they appointed seven men “to serve tables”, whom they then ordained. The first mentioned is Stephen: “full of grace and power”, he accomplished much for the new faith and for the poor in the Christian community. Over the centuries the diaconate became merely a degree of Holy Orders on the way to the presbyterate, but today it is once again an independent vocation for both celibates and married men. On the one hand, this is supposed to reemphasize service as a characteristic of the Church; on the other hand, it helps the priests, as in the early Church, by establishing an order of ministers who take on particular pastoral and social duties of the Church. Diaconal ordination, too, makes a lifelong, irrevocable mark on the ordained man.

#242 WHY SHOULD THE CHURCH TAKE SPECIAL CARE OF THE SICK? Jesus shows us: Heaven suffers with us when we suffer. God even wants to be rediscovered in “the least of these my brethren” (Mt 25:40). That is why Jesus designated care of the sick as a central task for his disciples. He commands them, “Heal the sick” (Mt 10:8), and he promises them divine authority: “In my name they will cast out demons; . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16:17-18). One of the distinctive characteristics of Christianity has always been that the elderly, the sick, and the needy are central to it. Mother Teresa, who cared for those who were dying in the gutters of Calcutta, is only one in a long series of Christian women and men who have discovered Christ precisely in those who were marginalized and avoided by others. When Christians are really Christian, a healing influence goes out from them. Some even have the gift of healing others physically in the power of the Holy Spirit (the charism of healing).

#492 DOES MY PERSONAL PRAYER HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH? In the Church’s public worship, in her Liturgy of the Hours and in Holy Mass, common prayers are recited that come from Sacred Scripture or from the Tradition of the Church. They unite the individual with the praying community of the Church. Christian prayer is not a private matter, but it is very personal. Personal prayer becomes purified, expands, and is strengthened when it regularly flows into the prayer of the whole Church. It is a great and beautiful sign when believers throughout the earth are united at the same time in the same prayers and thereby sing one hymn of praise to God.

#343 HOW DOES THE CHURCH HELP US TO LEAD A GOOD, RESPONSIBLE LIFE? In the Church we are baptized. In the Church we receive the faith that the Church has preserved intact down through the centuries. In the Church we hear the living Word of God and learn how we must live if we want to please God. Through the sacraments that Jesus entrusted to his disciples, the Church builds us up, strengthens, and consoles us. In the Church there is the blazing fire of the saints, by which our hearts are kindled. In the Church the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, in which Christ’s sacrifice and strength are renewed for us in such a way that, united with him, we become his Body and live by his strength. Despite all her human weaknesses, apart from the Church no one can be a Christian.