

Session 8



WHY DO I
NEED THE
CHURCH?



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

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WHY DO I NEED THE CHURCH?

The Mystery of the Catholic Church

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard people say they were “spiritual but not religious”? It can be hard to tell what they mean. They may mean they believe in God or a “higher power” but don’t attend church. Or they might mean they don’t want to have to obey any so-called “man-made” rules or regulations.

As sincere as these people may be (and many are very sincere), religion and spirituality are intricately interwoven. Jesus never expected us to follow a spiritual path without a community, the Church. The truly spiritual life is, as Jesus himself said, like a vine in which he is the trunk and we are the branches. He intends us to be united in his Church through our beliefs, our worship, and the Apostles and their successors whom he left on earth to guide us. And once we begin to understand the mystery of the Church, we realize that it is as impossible to be spiritual without being religious as it is to swim without getting into the water.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The mystery of the Church and what it means in our lives**
- **How the Church has two dimensions: human and divine**
- **The three ways the unity of the Church is made manifest**
- **The four marks (or chief characteristics) of the Church**
- **Why Jesus established only one Church**
- **How the Church can be holy when it is filled with sinners**
- **What it means when we say the Church is apostolic**
- **Why we call the Church “Catholic”**

OPENING PRAYER

We praise you,
O almighty and eternal God!
Who through Jesus Christ
hast revealed your glory to all nations,
to preserve the works of your mercy,
that your Church,
being spread through
the whole world,
may continue with unchanging faith
in the confession of your name.
Amen.

—www.catholic.org



“... God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.”

—Pope Francis

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Church is unique among all institutions in the world, because it has both divine and human dimensions that come together in perfect unity. What are the three ways this unity of the Church is made manifest?
2. The Church has four characteristics or distinctive marks that sets her apart from all other Christian denominations. What are these “marks of the Church” and what do they mean?
3. Let’s say that your friend says to you that he (or she) is “spiritual” but not a “religious” person. What is the problem with that statement?

CALL TO CONVERSION

#1 In the video, we heard that Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with us in his Church, but not a private, individualistic relationship. What are the differences between a personal relationship with God in his Church and an individualistic relationship with God?

#2 Reflect on the following quote:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” — John 15:5–7

Jesus describes himself as the vine and we, united to him in the Church, are the branches. In what ways can you “remain” in Jesus? What comes to mind when you read Jesus’s promise that if we remain in him, we will bear much fruit? What kind of fruit would you like to bear in this life?

#3 Even though most Americans claim to believe in God, more and more embrace the idea of being “spiritual” but not belonging to an organized religion or church. One of the fundamental reasons for this attitude, according to the presenters in the video, is that we don’t like the idea that there is something outside of ourselves with an objective standard that has the right to guide, inform, and correct our beliefs and behavior. Some people might want the benefits of being “spiritual,” but they don’t want the challenges that come with real growth and transformation. Are there ways that you keep the Church and her teachings at a distance because you don’t want to be challenged or have to change your life? What would you have to change or give up to fully embrace all the teachings of the Church? How might your life be different if you gave yourself over completely to Christ and his Church?



CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
at your Last Supper
you prayed to the Father
that all should be one.
Send your Holy Spirit
upon all who bear your name
and seek to serve you.
Strengthen our faith in you,
and lead us to love one another
in humility.
May we who have been reborn
in one Baptism
be united in one faith under one Shepherd.
Amen.



—www.prayer-and-prayers.info/catholic-prayers/prayer-for-christian-unity.htm

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Here is a verse from the Bible that you can memorize and reflect on this week to help you apply today's session to your daily life:



"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

—John 15:5

DO YOU REALLY NEED THE CHURCH?

TO ENRICH YOUR CATHOLIC FAITH, VISIT FORMED.org

Where you'll find helpful videos, audio presentations, and ebooks from the most trustworthy presenters in the Catholic world.

For Further Reading:

For more in-depth reading about the Church, see the following *Catechism* passages:

- *The Church is One: CCC 813–814*
- *The Church is Holy: CCC 823–825*
- *The Church is Catholic: CCC 830–831*
- *The Church is Apostolic: CCC 857*
- *The bonds of unity in the Church: CCC 815*
- *Bishops as successors of the Apostles: CCC 861–862*

Other Resources:

- *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 10, 11*
- *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* by **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger**
- *The Compact History of the Catholic Church* by **Alan Schreck Ph.D.**
- *Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic History* by **Matthew Bunson**
- *By What Authority? An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition* by **Mark P. Shea**