

## *What Is the Catholic Church?*

### **Q. 138. What is the Catholic Church?**

The Catholic Church is the community of all baptized persons united in the same true faith, the same sacrifice, the same sacraments, under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, the Bishop of Rome, and the bishops in communion with him.

In the Old Testament, God made Israel the first People of God. He made Israel a sacred community, dearer to Him than all other nations. They were to be the bearers of God's blessings to the world and His instruments to reunite a torn and divided mankind. To help them faithfully endure their trials, He reminded them that He was caring for them as a loving Father.

God remained faithful to them even when they sinned. He brought them out of Egypt and fed them in the desert. He said that He would always care for them as His special possession, and He asked them to accept His love and be His adopted children. After the Children of Israel had wandered in the desert for forty years, God led them into the land originally promised to Abraham.

Although Israel as a whole failed in its devotion to God, a few people remained faithful. They were the remnant of the once great Israel, and they depended on God alone. Through them, He would keep His promise to send the world a Savior Who would draw all men into the family of God.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God born of Mary, was a descendant of the great Israelite king, David. With the scattered fragments of Israel, Jesus established a new kingdom, the Church, intended for all peoples. He brought peace to His people and freed them from the bondage of sin and the sadness due to sin. He is our Savior.

Our Lord Jesus formed His followers, the community of believers, into one body to proclaim the Gospel to all men. He called this body the Church, which is the Catholic Church. This was to be the new People of God.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), this concept of the Catholic Church was qualified to include, but not fully, all who are baptized and profess their faith in Jesus Christ. Their possession of truth and holiness, elements belonging by right to the Catholic Church, is the principle which propels them to unite ever more fully with that Church founded by Christ Himself.

God has chosen the new People of God to be His own and has bestowed the special graces of His providence on them.

#### ***Sacred Scripture***

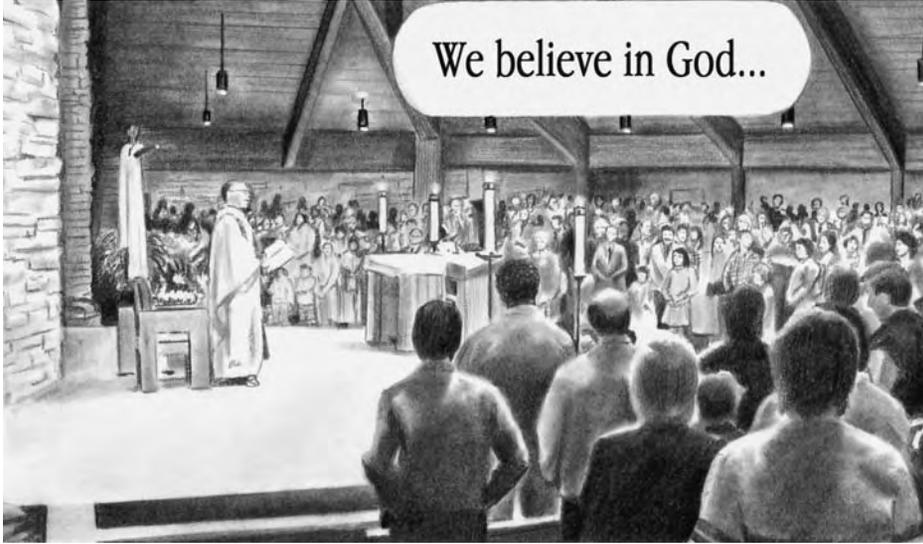
And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church. *Ephesians 1:22*

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. *1 Corinthians 12:27.*

*For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.*

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. *1 Peter 2:9-10*

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### ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***

**751** The word “Church” (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-ka-lein*, to “call out of”) means a convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose.<sup>1</sup> *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people.<sup>2</sup> By calling itself “Church,” the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is “calling together” his people from all the ends of the earth. The equivalent Greek term *Kyriake*, from which the English word *Church* and the German *Kirche* are derived, means “what belongs to the Lord.”

**839** “Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.”<sup>1</sup> “*The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People.* When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People,<sup>2</sup> ‘the first to hear the Word of God.’<sup>3</sup> The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews ‘belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ’;<sup>4</sup> ‘for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.’<sup>5</sup>”

### ***Vatican Council II***

Hence the universal Church is seen to be “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” *The Church, 4*

In the Old Testament the revelation of the kingdom is often made under the forms of symbols. In similar fashion the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in various images. Taken either from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage, these images have their preparation in the books of the prophets. *The Church, 6*

But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with

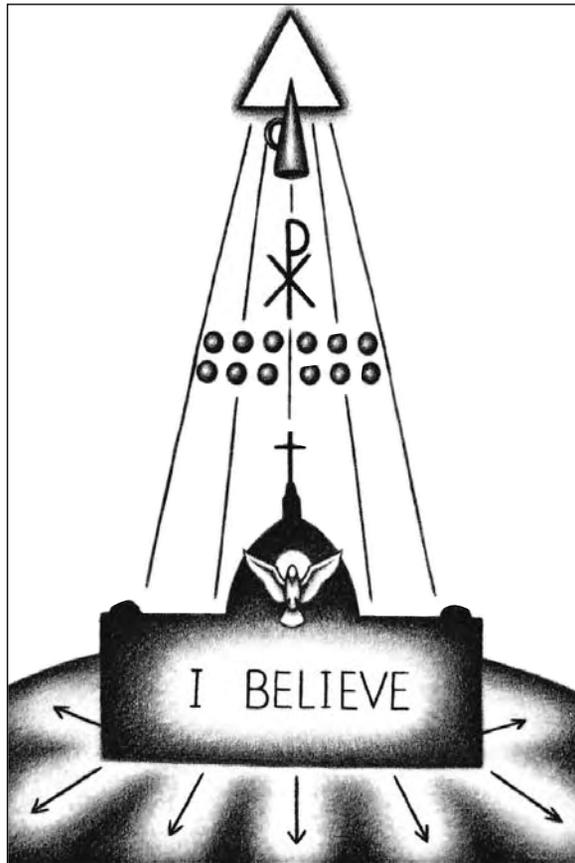
heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. *The Church, 8*

The Church is compared, in a powerful analogy, to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (cf. Eph. 4:15). *The Church, 8*

As Israel according to the flesh which wandered in the desert was already called the Church of God (2 Esd.; 13:1 cf. Num. 20:4; Deut. 23:1 ff.), so too, the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city (cf. Heb. 13:14), is called also the Church of Christ (cf. Mt. 16:18). It is Christ indeed who had purchased it with his own blood (cf. Acts 20:28); he has filled it with his Spirit; he has provided means adapted to its visible and social union. *The Church, 9*

## Catechism by Diagram

#C15-57



**The Church, Founded by Jesus Christ.** The Church is the new People of God, prepared for in the Old Testament and given life, growth, and direction by Christ (monogram) in the Holy Spirit (dove). Founded by Christ upon the Apostles, it had its origin in Jesus' death and Resurrection (cross). In order to proclaim the message of salvation, to extend His kingdom (arrows pointing to all directions), to be present in the world (earth) for all people, to teach us, to shepherd us, and to pour His grace upon us, Jesus entrusted to His twelve Apostles (twelve circles) the power, right, and duty in His Church (St. Peter's Basilica) to teach, guide, and sanctify (rays from triangle) all men. God speaks to us (horn) through Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and His Church, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church preaches the faith (I believe) in every part of the world.



### **Summary Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, even today we see the wonders of the miracles You worked long ago. Once You saved a single nation from their slavery in Egypt. Now through Baptism, You offer everyone eternal salvation from the slavery of sin. May the peoples of the world become true sons of Abraham and prove worthy of the heritage of Israel.*

*Father in Heaven, from the days of Abraham and Moses until this gathering of Your Church in prayer, You have formed a people in the image of Your Son. Bless this people with the gift of Your Kingdom. May we serve You with our every desire and show love for one another even as You have loved us.*

*Almighty God, ever-living mystery of unity and Trinity, You gave life to the new Israel by birth from water and the Spirit, and made it a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people set apart as Your eternal possession. May all those whom You have called to walk in the splendor of the new light render You fitting service and adoration.*

*Enable us to live honorably and unselfishly in this world, and so arrive at the glories of the heavenly city where, in union with all the blessed company of heaven, we shall sing of Your majestic deeds forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise** (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. Why is the Catholic Church called the “new People of God”? What sets the Catholic Church apart from other religious bodies?
2. How can you concretely show your gratitude to God for having made you a member of the Catholic Church?
3. Thank Jesus from the depths of your heart for His gift of the Catholic Church.



### **Q. 139. When did Jesus start the Catholic Church?**

Jesus started the Catholic Church at the time of His death and Resurrection, more than nineteen hundred years ago.

Jesus earned for us the privilege of belonging to God's holy family, the Church, by His death and Resurrection. In order to enter that family, we must have sanctifying grace, which we first receive at Baptism and which cleanses our soul from sin and restores our friendship with God.

By the power of Baptism, we become members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Thus we become united to one another through our union with Christ, Who is the Head of the Body. Incorporated into Christ, we are freed from sin's dominion.

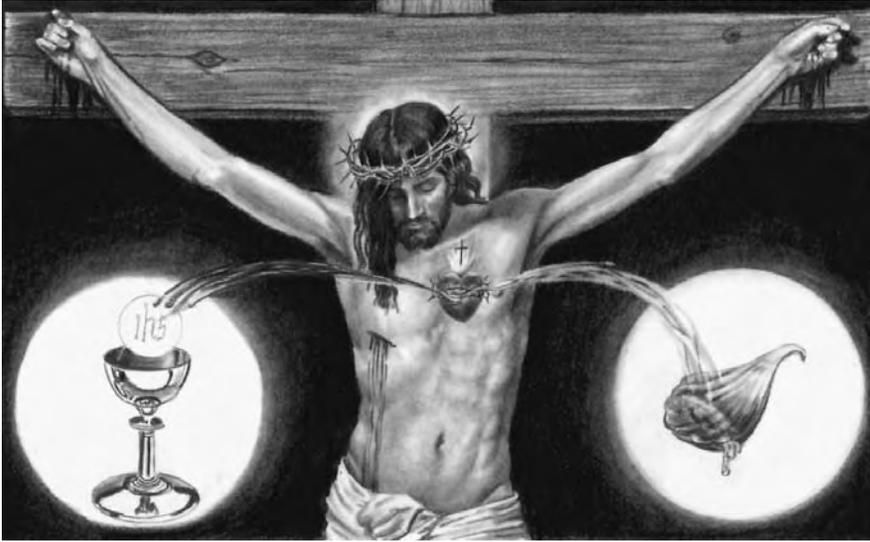
#### ***Sacred Scripture***

And Jesus came and said to them [Apostles], "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." *Matthew 28:18-20*

#### ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***

**778** The Church is both the means and the goal of God's plan: prefigured in creation, prepared for in the Old Covenant, founded by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, fulfilled by his redeeming cross and his Resurrection, the Church has been manifested as the mystery of salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She will be perfected in the glory of heaven as the assembly of all the redeemed of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

*For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.*



### ***Vatican Council II***

The mystery of the holy Church is already brought to light in the way it was founded. For the Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the kingdom of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 4:17). This kingdom shone out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ. *The Church, 5*

For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth “the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.” *Sacred Liturgy, 5*

Often, too, the Church is called the building of God (1 Cor. 3:9). The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone (Mt. 21:42; cf. Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Ps. 117:22). On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11) and from it the Church receives solidity and unity. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which his family dwells; the household of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19, 22); the dwelling-place of God among men (Apoc. 21:3); and, especially, the holy temple. This temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it (1 Pet. 2:5). It is this holy city that is seen by John as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband (Apoc. 21:1 f.). *The Church, 6*

### ***Summary Prayer***

*Lord Jesus Christ, faithful witness and first-born from the dead, be our Life and our Resurrection. High Priest of the new and eternal covenant, intercede for Your holy Church. You Who loved us and washed away our sins in Your blood, make us holy so that we may serve our God worthily.*

*When You rose from the dead, Lord Jesus, You formed the Church into Your Mystical Body and made of it the new Jerusalem, united in Your Spirit. Give us peace in our day. Guide all nations into Your Church so that they may share Your gifts in fellowship, render You thanks without end, and come to Your eternal city. We ask this in Your most powerful and holy Name. Amen.*



***Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise*** (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. When and how did Christ lay the foundations of the Catholic Church? How does one become a member of the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ?
2. What should our attitude be towards all members of the Church? How can we remain united with Christ and with one another?
3. Renew the promises which were made at your Baptism. Thank the Lord for making you part of His family and ask Him for the grace to remain faithful to your baptismal promises.

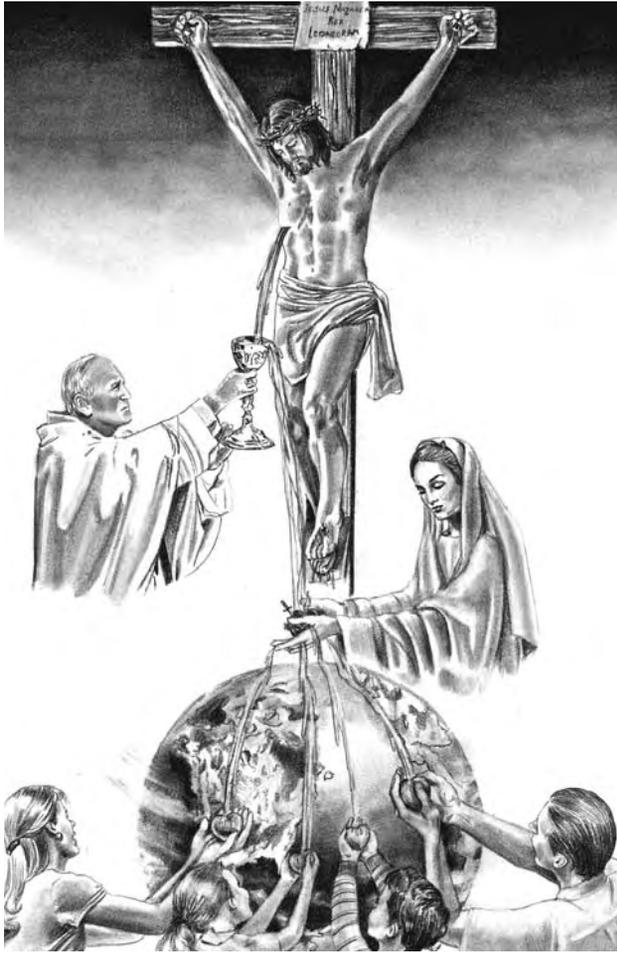
***Chapter Summary Prayer***

*Lord Jesus our Savior, build up the faith of Your pilgrim Church on earth, that it may bear witness to Your Resurrection before the whole world. Fill our minds with the light of faith. Through Your Resurrection, You opened for us the way to eternal life; sustain us with the hope of glory. You sent the Holy Spirit into the world; set our hearts on fire with spiritual love.*

*Lord Jesus, in You, Who has risen from the dead, God has opened for us the way to everlasting life. Through Your victory, save the people You have redeemed.*

*The Father has established in You the foundation of all our hope and the principle of our resurrection. We rejoice with You, King of Glory, and we thank You for the privilege of belonging to the Church which You have founded and which began at the time of Your death and Resurrection. You were crucified to set us free; be our salvation and redemption.*

*Be with Your Church on its pilgrimage through life. Do not let us be slow to believe, but help us, as members of Your Church, to be ready to proclaim You as Victor over sin and death forever and ever. Amen.*



**Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 41**

*See Appendix A for more references.*

**Q. 138. What is the Catholic Church?**

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 1, 8, 9, 49;*  
*On Evangelization in the Modern World, Paul VI, sect. 75;*  
*On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 62-64;*  
*Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 18-19;*  
*Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican II, sect. 6;*

**Q. 139. When did Jesus start the Catholic Church?**

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 4, 5, 49;*  
*On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 25, 52, 66.*



**Thought Provokers**

*Please see Appendix C for the answers.*

Q. 138: Is the Church, the new People of God, a continuation of the old People of God, that is, the Jews of the Old Testament period?

Q. 139: Sometimes the Church is said to have begun at Pentecost; and sometimes, with Jesus' death upon the Cross. Why is this?