

The Marks of the Church: The Church Is Holy

Q. 177. Why is the Catholic Church holy?

The Catholic Church is holy because it was founded by Jesus Christ, Who is all-holy, and because it teaches holy doctrines according to the will of Christ. It provides the means of leading a holy life, thereby giving holy members to every age.

We can point to the saints as proof that the holiness of Christ is at work in the Catholic Church. But it would be an even greater proof of the holiness of the Church if all of us would live holy lives, if every Catholic were a person of outstanding Christian virtue.

Jesus prayed to His Father for His Church, “Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth... And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (John 17:17, 19).

St. Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

The Holy Spirit preserves the Church as the Body of Christ and His Bride, so that in spite of the sins of its members it will never fail in faithfulness to Him and will meet Him in holiness at the end of the world. The Holy Spirit also helps the Church constantly to purify and renew itself.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

824 United with Christ, the Church is sanctified by him; through him and with him she becomes sanctifying. “All the activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God.”¹ It is in the Church that “the fullness of the means of salvation”² has been deposited. It is in her that “by the grace of God we acquire holiness.”³

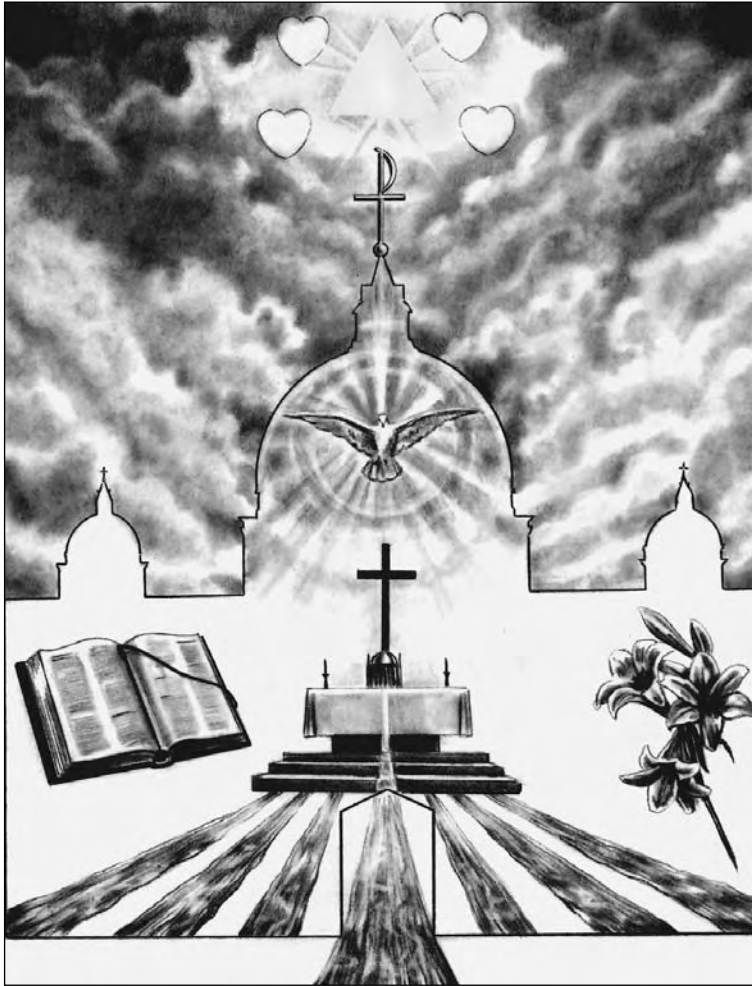
Splendor of Truth

Finally, martyrdom is an outstanding sign of the holiness of the Church. Fidelity to God’s holy law, witnessed to by death, is a solemn proclamation and missionary commitment... so that the splendor of moral truth may be undimmed in the behavior and thinking of individuals and society... By their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendor of moral truth, the martyrs and, in general, all the Church’s Saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense. By witnessing fully to the good, they are a living reproof to those who transgress the law (cf. Wis 2:12), and they make the words of the Prophet echo ever afresh: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Is 5:20). (*section 93*)

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

Catechism by Diagram

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The Catholic Church Is Holy. The Catholic Church (St. Peter's Basilica) is holy because it was founded by Jesus Christ (monogram) Who is all-holy, and because it teaches holy doctrines (Gospel book), and virtues (lilies), according to His will, and gives us the means of leading a holy life through the sacraments (seven streams from the altar), especially the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Spirit (dove) preserves the Church as the Body of Christ and His bride, so that—in spite of the sins of its members—it will never fail in faithfulness to Him and will meet Him in holiness at the end of the world (hearts in heaven, triangle). The Holy Spirit also helps the Church constantly to purify and renew itself and its members.

Vatican Council II

Christ, “holy, innocent and undefiled” (Heb. 7:26) knew nothing of sin (2 Cor. 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf. Heb. 2:17). The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. *The Church*, 8

The Church, whose mystery is set forth by this sacred Council, is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as “alone holy,” loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanc-

tify her (cf. Eph. 5:25-26); he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. *The Church, 39*

Likewise the Church's holiness is fostered in a special way by the manifold counsels which the Lord proposes to his disciples in the Gospel for them to observe. Towering among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor. 7:7) to devote themselves to God alone more easily with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. *The Church, 42*

The state of life, then, which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness. *The Church, 44*

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Summary Prayer

Eternal God, Your Spirit guides the Church and makes it holy. Listen to our prayers and help each of us in Your Church, in his own vocation, to do Your work more faithfully, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

1. The Catholic Church is holy in spite of the sins of its members. Why?
2. How do you strive to live a holy life? Examine your conscience in the five areas of responsibility that we should make time for each day: sacramental life, prayer and formation, family and community, work, and evangelization. Write down the areas in your life where you need to improve in your pursuit of holiness.
3. Each day, renew your desire to become holy. Pray that the Church and her members may be constantly purified and renewed by the Holy Spirit.



Chapter Summary Prayer

Almighty God, only hope of the world, by the preaching of the prophets, You proclaimed the mysteries we celebrate in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Help us to be Your faithful people, for it is by Your inspiration alone that we can grow in holiness.

Father, the Body of Your risen Son is the temple not made by human hands and the defending wall of the New Jerusalem. May this holy city, built of living stones, shine with spiritual radiance and so witness to Your greatness in the sight of all the nations.

God, You are the source of all holiness. Though no one can see You and live, You give life more generously, and, in an even greater way, You restore it. Sanctify Your priests through Your life-giving Word and consecrate Your

people in His Blood until the day that our eyes may see Your face in heavenly bliss.

Words cannot measure the boundaries of love for those who are born to a new life in Christ Jesus. Raise men beyond the limits of this world, so that we may be free to love as Christ teaches us and to find our joy in Your glory.

Clothe Your priests in righteousness and make Your Chosen People joyful. Give Your people strength and holiness. Bless Your people with peace and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 50

See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 177. Why is the Catholic Church holy?

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 8, 9;

The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, John Paul II, sect. 16-17;

On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II, sect. 27;

On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 25-26, 62-64.



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

Q. 177: Are the members of the Catholic Church holy?