

The Marks of the Church: The Church Is Apostolic

Q. 181. Why is the Catholic Church apostolic?

The Catholic Church is apostolic because it is able to trace its lineage in unbroken continuity back to the Apostles.

Jesus said to Peter, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Speaking to all the Apostles, He said, “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).

Among the Apostles, Christ chose St. Paul to spread His Church. Speaking of him, Jesus said, “He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). Paul became the greatest missionary of all time. He brought the Gospel of Christ to the pagan world at the cost of great sacrifices.

To the Ephesians Paul wrote: “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Since the days of the Apostles, episcopal power, that power held by the bishops, has been passed on through the sacrament of Holy Orders, from generation to generation, from bishop to bishop. By the popes, bishops, priests, and deacons, the Gospel of Christ is preached in every part of the world, in fulfillment of the promise of Christ, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).

Sacred Scripture

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”
2 Timothy 2:1-2

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858 Jesus is the Father’s Emissary. From the beginning of his ministry, he “called to him those whom he desired;.... And he appointed twelve, whom also he named apostles, to be with

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

Sacred Scripture

Q. 181. 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Tim 1:6, 11-14.

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Q. 181. Paragraphs 857-865, 869.

him, and to be sent out to preach.”²¹ From then on, they would also be his “emissaries” (Greek *apostoloi*). In them, Christ continues his own mission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”²² The apostles’ ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: “he who receives you receives me.”²³

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Splendor of Truth

Within the unity of the Church, promoting and preserving the faith and the moral life is the task entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles (cf. Mt 28:19-20), a task which continues in the ministry of their successors. This is apparent from the living Tradition, whereby—as the Second Vatican Council teaches—“the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that she is and all that she believes. This Tradition which comes from the Apostles, progresses in the Church under the assistance of the Holy Spirit.” (section 27)

The Church has faithfully preserved what the word of God teaches, not only about truths which must be believed but also about moral action, action pleasing to God (cf. 1 Th 4:1); she has achieved a doctrinal development analogous to that which has taken place in the realm of the truths of faith. Assisted by the Holy Spirit who leads her into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13), the Church has not ceased, nor can she ever cease, to contemplate the “mystery of the Word Incarnate,” in whom “light is shed on the mystery of man.” (section 28)

Vatican Council II

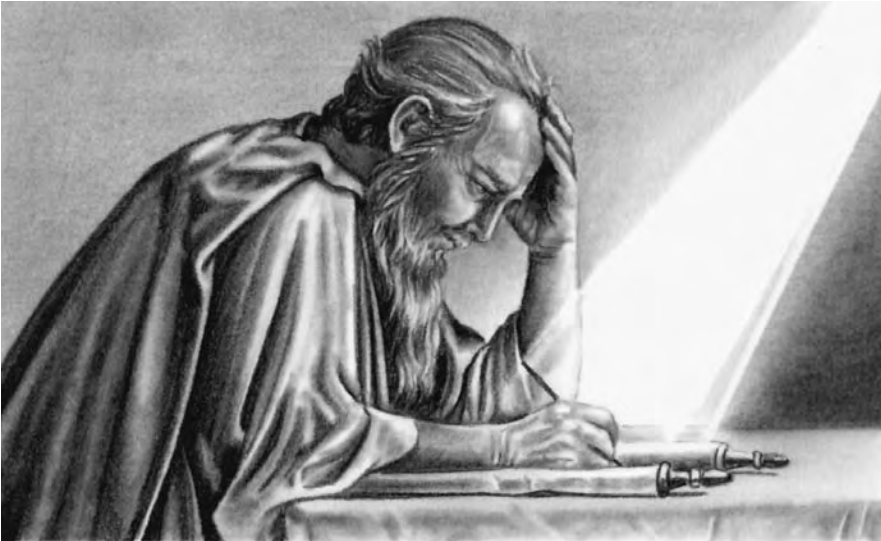
The Lord Jesus, having prayed at length to the Father, called to himself those whom he willed and appointed twelve to be with him, whom he might send to preach the kingdom of God (cf. Mk. 3:13-19; Mt. 10:1-42). These apostles (cf. Lk. 6:13) he constituted in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from amongst them (cf. Jn. 21:15-17). He sent them first of all to the children of Israel and then to all peoples (cf. Rom. 1:16), so that, sharing in his power, they might make all peoples his disciples and sanctify and govern them (cf. Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:45-48; Jn. 20:21-23) and thus spread the Church and, administering it under the guidance of the Lord, shepherd it all days until the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20). They were fully confirmed in this mission on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-26) according to the promise of the Lord: “You shall receive power when

the Holy Ghost descends upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). By preaching everywhere the Gospel (cf. Mk. 16:20), welcomed and received under the influence of the Holy Spirit by those who hear it, the apostles gather together the universal Church, which the Lord founded upon the apostles and built upon blessed Peter their leader, the chief corner-stone being Christ Jesus himself (cf. Apoc. 21:14; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20). *The Church, 19*

That divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society. *The Church, 20*

God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations. Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:16-4, 6) commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing. *Divine Revelation, 7*

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St. Mark the Evangelist

The apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time. Hence the apostles, in handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to maintain the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter (cf. 2 Th. 2:15); and they warn them to fight hard for the faith that had been handed on to them once and for all (cf. Jude 3). What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.

The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk. 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her. *Divine Revelation*, 8

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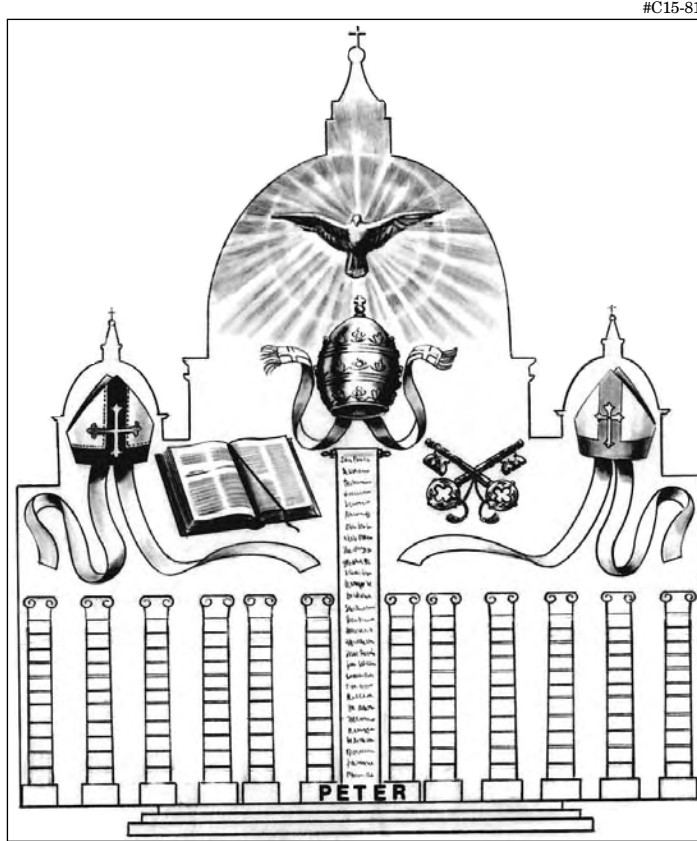
Summary Prayer

Father, through the Apostles, Your Church first received the faith; keep us true to their teaching. Through the prayers of the Apostles, may we who received this faith through their preaching share their joy in following the Lord to the unfading inheritance which is reserved for us in heaven. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

1. Which passage in Sacred Scripture shows Jesus founding the Catholic Church on the Apostles? Try to find a list of the popes from St. Peter to the present day. Show this list to your family and friends as you explain why the Catholic Church is called apostolic.
2. Jesus willed that the authority and ministry which He gave to the Apostles be passed on to the Pope and the bishops. If you have a chance to meet a bishop, how will you treat him? What will you tell him?
3. Using the Chapter Summary Prayer, reflect on the authority of the Pope and the bishops. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help them to be holy and dedicated shepherds of the flock entrusted to them.

Catechism by Diagram



The Catholic Church Is Apostolic. The Catholic Church is able to prove its legitimate descent from the Apostles, upon whom as a foundation (twelve white blocks) Jesus established His Church (St. Peter's Basilica). We have the list of the Bishops of Rome (tiara), going back from the Holy Father of our own day in a continuous line to St. Peter. The other bishops (miters, twelve columns) are today's links in an unbroken chain back over more than nineteen hundred years. Since the days of the Apostles, the bishops have had the episcopal power to teach, sanctify (Gospel book) and rule (keys) the faithful as shepherds of the flock of Christ. The Holy Spirit (dove) carries out Christ's work in the world.

Chapter Summary Prayer

Father in heaven, You founded Your Church on the Apostles so that she might stand firm forever as the sign on earth of Your infinite holiness and as the living Gospel for all men to hear.

You are the eternal Shepherd Who never leaves His flock untended. Through the Apostles, You watched over and protected the Church.

You made them shepherds of the flock to share in the work of Your Son; from their place in heaven, they guide us still.

Lord our God, encourage us through the prayers of Saints Peter and Paul. May the Apostles, who strengthened the faith of the infant Church, help us on our way of salvation.

The light of Your revelation brought Peter and Paul the gift of faith in Jesus, Your Son. Through their prayers, may we always give thanks for Your life, which is given to us in Christ Jesus, and for the knowledge and love with which He has enriched us.

You have set us firmly within Your Church, which You built upon the rock of Peter, our first Pope. May You bless us with a faith that never falters. You have given us knowledge of the faith through the labor and preaching of St. Paul. May his example inspire us to lead others to Christ by the manner of our lives.

May Peter and Paul, by their undying witness and their prayers, lead us to the joy of that eternal home which Peter gained by his cross, and Paul by the sword.

Pour on us the Holy Spirit, Who filled Your Apostles, that we may acknowledge the gifts we have received through them. Keep us faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, united in prayer and in the Breaking of Bread in the Eucharist, and in joy and simplicity of heart.

Lord God, You appointed Paul, Your Apostle, to preach the Good News of salvation. Fill the entire world with the faith he carried to so many peoples and nations, that Your Church may continue to grow. May Your Spirit fill us with the light which led St. Paul to make Your glory known. May Christ be our life and let nothing separate us from His love. Following the teachings of St. Paul, may we live in love with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Teach us, Father, to lift up our hands and our hearts reverently in prayer and to hold to the pattern of sound teaching which You delivered to the holy Apostles. To You be glory now and all honor forever. Amen.

Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 52

See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 181. Why is the Catholic Church apostolic?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 8, 18-25, 27, 28;
On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II, sect. 26;
Splendor of Truth, John Paul II, sect. 107.*



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

Q. 181: Do all bishops, who are successors of the Apostles, belong to the Catholic Church?
