

UNIT ONE: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

LESSON 5: The Church is Catholic and Apostolic: THE HOUSE OF GOD

CONTENTS OF LESSON:

1. The Church is Catholic. Catholic means 'universal' or 'in keeping with the whole'. This means that Christ is wholly present in her and she is sent to the whole world. [CCC 830-831]
2. The Church is apostolic, because she is founded by Christ on the 12 apostles. The apostles' teaching is handed on, and their successors the bishops still guide the Church. [CCC 857]
 - i) The Church is the 'House of God'. Christ is the key-stone (corner-stone). This edifice is built on the foundation of the apostles. Each of us is called to be a 'living stone' in this building. Because of the presence of God it becomes a 'holy temple'. [CCC 756]
3. Christ made St. Peter (and his successors the popes) the visible head of the Church. The pope has the authority and duty to guide the entire people of God. We consider the pope 'infallible' when he proclaims a teaching pertaining to faith or morals. [CCC 891, 936-937]
4. The bishops are the successors of the apostles. Helped by the priests they teach the faith and celebrate divine worship. [CCC 939]
5. Lay people are called to be 'leaven' in the world, bringing God's kingdom into the everyday world. In Christ they are 'priests' (offering up their lives to God); 'prophets' (being witnesses and sharing their faith with others) and 'kings' (overcoming sin and evil in themselves and in the world). [CCC 901, 904-5, 908-9, 940]

REFERENCES: Matthew 10:2-4, 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-21; 1Peter 2:4-5.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; 2 plastic tumblers (or Jenga blocks) for each student.

I. STARTER:

- Let's begin with another competition. Last time built a giant using our own bodies. Today each of you will get 2 tumblers. After your teams are formed, your goal is to build a building which is tall, but stable. Important rule: Each person is only allowed to handle his/her own tumblers. No one else is allowed to touch it, even if it falls. If anyone breaks this rule, you will have to start from the beginning. After 2 minutes the 'hands-off' signal will be given and you will have to move away.

[Divide the class into teams of about 6-8 students. A referee is appointed for each team, to make sure they follow the rules. After the 'hands off' signal, go around and appreciate the efforts. Ask the teams to judge their own buildings based on stability and height.]

- Discuss in your group: What HELPED you and what HINDERED you to reach your goal?
[Write down the points brought out by the students, using the blackboard to summarize, as shown. (Points will differ, according to the students' feedback)]

| WHAT HELPED US | WHAT HINDERED US |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| -All cooperated | -Members did not listen |
| - Good leader | -Members broke the rule |
| -Good ideas | -Lack of leadership |
| | -Wind, tumblers were too light |

II. DEVELOPMENT:

- As you must have guessed, this activity was connected with the Church. We have been looking at the Church as the Body of Christ, then as a 'Communion of Saints'. Do you think it can be called a 'building'? Does this idea bring any Bible passages to mind? How can we call the Church a building?

[Accept suggestions, then give out the handouts.. Ask the students first to share what they have found out about the words 'catholic' and 'apostolic'. They write down the answers in the handouts:]

- Catholic means UNIVERSAL or WHOLE.
- The Church is called Catholic because 1. Christ is wholly present in her, (since she is the Body of Christ) and 2. The Church is for everyone, for the whole world. Jesus said to give the Good News to the whole of creation.
- The Church is called 'apostolic' because she is founded on the apostles. Jesus appointed the 12 apostles to care for and lead the Church. Their successors (the pope and bishops) continue to govern and care for God's people. (We call them the Magisterium.) The apostles, carry on guiding the Church with their teaching. (We call it Sacred Tradition).
- You already gave some reasons why the Church can be compared to a building. Let's now read a few passages from the Bible and see what it has to tell us about it.
[Students read the three passages at the bottom of the page and fill in the missing words, using their Bibles. They also fill in the names of the apostles in the 'foundation stones'(Mt 10:2-4) and JESUS CHRIST in the 'key-stone'.]
 1. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
 2. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.
 3. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades(or hell) will not prevail against it.
 4. Simon (or Peter), Andrew; James John; Philip, Bartholomew; Thomas, Matthew; James, Thaddeus; Simon, Judas. [Instead of Judas, students could write Matthias, who took the place of Judas after he killed himself. (Acts 1:260).]
- Let us look now at the household of God: The people who belong to his house. Let's talk a little about their roles. Just as in any household different people have different roles, it works well if everyone understands and accepts their roles. E.g. If both father and mother believe that they are only responsible to earn money and the other one should care for the family, there would be no food on the table. Or if the children feel they have no duties except to study, the burden would fall on the adults and the children would grow up selfish and uncaring.
- So let's first look at the role of the Pope, bishops and priests.

[Accept students' suggestions, then fill in the answers:]

- The Pope has the authority and duty to guide the whole Church. As the successor of Peter, he too receives the 'keys of the kingdom'. We call the pope 'infallible'. This means that he is right when he speaks with the authority of Christ, in a definite way to teach us about faith or morals. Every word that falls from his mouth is not necessarily right. E.g. If he says, "It's going to rain today!" or "This food has gone bad!" it is not necessary that he is right. He may be mistaken. But if he says in a formal way to the whole Church, "It is morally wrong to abort an unborn child." Then God expects us to accept and follow his teaching, because he is speaking in Christ's name.
- The bishops teach the faith and celebrate divine worship. The priests are their co-workers. They are the successors of the apostles and are united with the pope into one 'college' as it is called. All priests have the very special calling to administer the sacraments and especially to celebrate the Eucharist.

- Finally we come to the laity, or all of us who are baptized, but not ordained as priests. What is our role? Are we supposed to just receive all that is given, or do we have a job to do? The Church tells us that we are supposed to be 'leaven' in the world. (Leaven means yeast that is put into the dough for making bread.)
- What does that mean in practice? How can we be yeast in the world? *[Just as yeast changes the dough and makes it rise and become light and bubbly, we have to enter the everyday world and change it, by bringing Christ into it. Priests cannot do this. They cannot enter daily into our offices, homes, neighborhoods, colleges etc. God relies on us to do this.]*
- When we were baptized, we became priests, prophets and kings with Christ. What do you think this means? *[Bring out:]*
 1. PRIEST: In most religions, a priest is someone who offers sacrifice to God. We are also supposed to offer up a sacrifice pleasing to God: What he desires is our very lives, no less. So practically this means that we try to do everything for God, as he wants. If we accept suffering and hardships patiently, this too becomes an offering which God accepts.
 2. PROPHET: Prophets speak God's word. We too are supposed to tell others about Christ, both by our example and by speaking about him. (Many Catholics are shy about speaking to others about Jesus. But the Church tells us that this is necessary, or people may miss the chance of knowing Jesus.)
 3. KING: A king has authority and rules over his kingdom. Since we belong to Christ the King, we too must rule, first over our own selves, (fight sin and temptations) and also work to fight sin and wrong things in society. E.g. We should fight for justice for poor and helpless people.

III. INTERIORISATION/PRAAYER:

Students reflect on the role of laity and check if they are in fact fulfilling God's call. They could identify one area that they feel called to change or begin doing something new. They first share this area, and then write a prayer about it to God.]

HOME ASSIGNMENT: ⇨ Read the handout.

⇨ Share what you have learnt about the role of laity at family prayer-time.