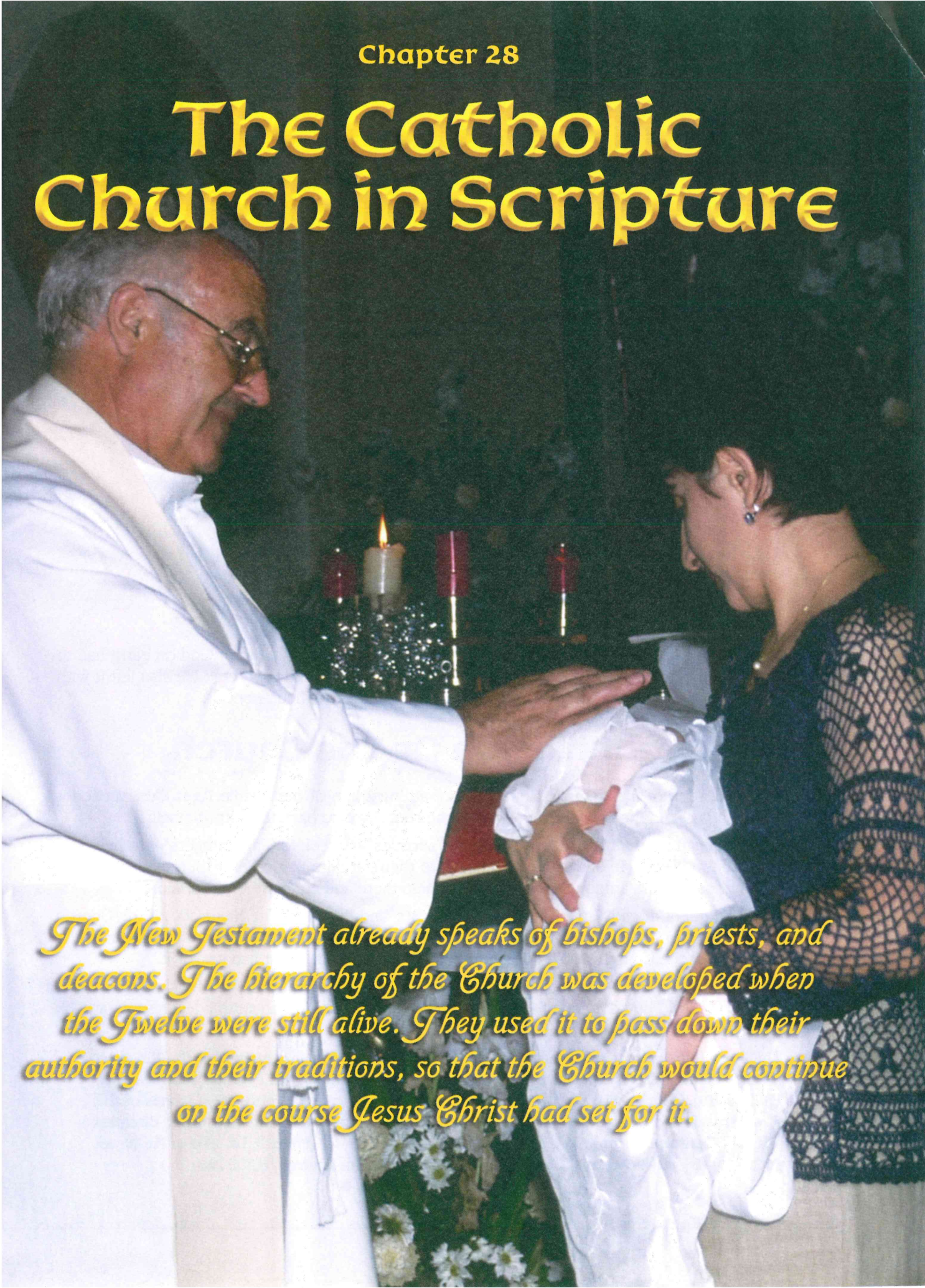


# The Catholic Church in Scripture



*The New Testament already speaks of bishops, priests, and deacons. The hierarchy of the Church was developed when the Twelve were still alive. They used it to pass down their authority and their traditions, so that the Church would continue on the course Jesus Christ had set for it.*

## Chapter 28

# The Catholic Church in Scripture



### Read

**Matthew**

16:13 - 28

28:16 - 20

19:3 - 12

**Acts 8:14 - 17**

**1 Corinthians**

11:25 - 32

**James 5:13 - 20**

**A** kingdom needs a certain organization, or it will fall apart. The Kingdom of God on earth had to last until the end of time, so Jesus Christ promised to guide and protect it. He also left it with a certain organization that would carry it through even the most difficult periods.

## Organization Of The Church

**T**he organization of the Catholic Church is not an invention of the Middle Ages. We can see it already at work in the New Testament, and the roots of it go back to Jesus himself.

When Jesus began his ministry, he chose twelve “apostles”—Greek for “messengers”—to help him spread the Good News. He entrusted his Church to them, and he made Peter their leader. In turn, the Twelve chose others among their followers to help them and continue their mission.

The New Testament already speaks of bishops, priests, and deacons. The hierarchy of the Church was developed when the Twelve were still alive. They used it to pass down their authority and their traditions, so that the Church would continue on the course Jesus Christ had set for it.

The bishops of the Church, as successors of the apostles with the Pope as their head, form a single “college” (CCC 880). They continue to lead the church in an unbroken chain that leads straight back to the Twelve.

**The Lord Jesus endowed his community with a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved. Before all else there is the choice of the Twelve with Peter as their head (cf. Mk 3:14-15). Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem (cf. Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Rv 21:12-14). The Twelve and the other disciples share in Christ’s mission and his power, but also in his lot (cf. Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1-2; Mt 10:25; Jn 15:20). By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church. (CCC 765)**



## The Primacy Of Peter

**T**he head of the apostles was Peter. Jesus himself made Peter their leader when Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God.

**And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [*petra* in Greek] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Mt 16: 17-18)<sup>1</sup>**

As soon as Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter began to act as the leader of the Church. The rest of the apostles never questioned his authority, even though before Jesus' death and resurrection they had all been vying for the position of "greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

- Peter was the one who decided that the apostles must replace Judas with Matthias.
- Peter was the one who spoke for the apostles at Pentecost.
- Peter was the one who defended the Christians before the Sanhedrin.
- Peter was the one who made the decision against circumcision at the Council of Jerusalem.
- Peter was the one who founded the church in Rome, the capital of the civilized world.

Paul the Apostle accepted wholeheartedly the position of Peter as first of the apostles without any hesitation.

Today, the successor of Peter, the Pope, continues to lead and defend the Church as first among the bishops, the successors of the apostles.



St. Peter's Throne by Bernini in St. Peter's Basilica, the Vatican, Rome

## Councils Of The Whole Church

**W**hen the Church faced its first important question of doctrine—whether Gentiles must be circumcised—the apostles met in Jerusalem to decide it. There was much debate, but ultimately the decision of the Church was expressed through Peter.

The Church still refers important questions to a council of the whole Church. (The most recent one was the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s.) Bishops meet and debate the questions before them, and ultimately the decision of the whole Church is expressed through the successor of Peter, the Pope.

The first council of the Church was the Council of Jerusalem, at which the apostles and leaders of the young Church debated the question of circumcision. There was “much debate,” Luke tells us in Acts 15:7. All the opinions of all the leaders of the Church were heard. But in the end, it was Peter, the leader, who pronounced the verdict of the whole Church. The decision of the council was written down and sent to the Christians in Antioch, where the question had come up.

## Sacraments

Sacraments are efficacious signs of God's grace instituted by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the Church.<sup>2</sup>

*"Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions, and to the consensus...of the Fathers," we profess that "the sacraments of the new law were...all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord." (CCC 1114)*

We can find the beginnings of all of them in Scripture, and their significance is ultimately bound up in the Paschal Mystery, that is, Christ's work of redemption accomplished principally by his Passion, death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension. The Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present in the liturgy of the Church, and its saving effects are communicated through the sacraments (CCC 1076), especially the Eucharist, which renews the paschal sacrifice of Christ as the sacrifice offered by the Church (CCC 571, 1362-1372). There are seven sacraments:

1. **Baptism**
2. **Confirmation**
3. **Eucharist**
4. **Penance (or Reconciliation)**
5. **Anointing of the Sick**
6. **Holy Orders**
7. **Matrimony**



Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries" (St. Leo the Great, *Sermo*. 74, 2: PL 54, 398). (CCC 1115)

Sacraments are "powers that comes forth" from the Body of Christ (cf. Lk 5:17; 6:19; 8:46), which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are "the masterworks of God" in the new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1116)

## Baptism

Baptism is a new birth in water and the Spirit.

**Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Jn 3:5)**

The Church teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. Jesus himself commanded his apostles to baptize:

**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 behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Mt 28:18-20)**

Normally a priest or deacon performs baptisms. But because baptism is so important, in an emergency any person, even a non-baptized person, with the required intention, can baptize by using the Trinitarian baptismal formula.

## Confirmation

**T**he Church has more than one tradition for the sacrament of Confirmation. In the eastern churches, confirmation usually happens at the same time as baptism. The priest administers the sacrament, using oil consecrated by the local bishop or the patriarch. In western churches, Confirmation usually comes later in life, and it is administered by the bishop himself.

We see the same difference in the book of Acts. When the apostles baptized a convert, they laid their hands on the new believer:

**On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:5-6)**

But when the apostles were not present, other believers baptized the converts. Then the apostles confirmed the baptism when they were in the area.

**Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)**

From these two accounts, we can see that confirmation completes baptism. The confirmand receives that out-pouring of the Holy Spirit that happened to the apostles at Pentecost. And it is the

apostles—and their successors, the bishops—who are responsible for the administration of this sacrament. Although ordinary priests administer the rite of confirmation in the eastern churches, the link with the apostles is still kept up by the oil specially consecrated by the bishop for confirmations.

In the first centuries Confirmation generally comprised one single celebration with Baptism, forming with it a “double sacrament,” according to the expression of St. Cyprian. Among other reasons, the multiplication of infant baptisms all through the year, the increase of rural parishes, and the growth of dioceses often prevented the bishop from being present at all baptismal celebrations. In the West the desire to reserve the completion of Baptism to the bishop caused the temporal separation of the two sacraments. The East has kept them united, so that Confirmation is conferred by the priest who baptizes. But he can do so only with the “myron” consecrated by a bishop (cf. CCEO, can. 695 § 1; 696 § 1). (CCC 1290)

## Eucharist

Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Mt 26: 26-29)

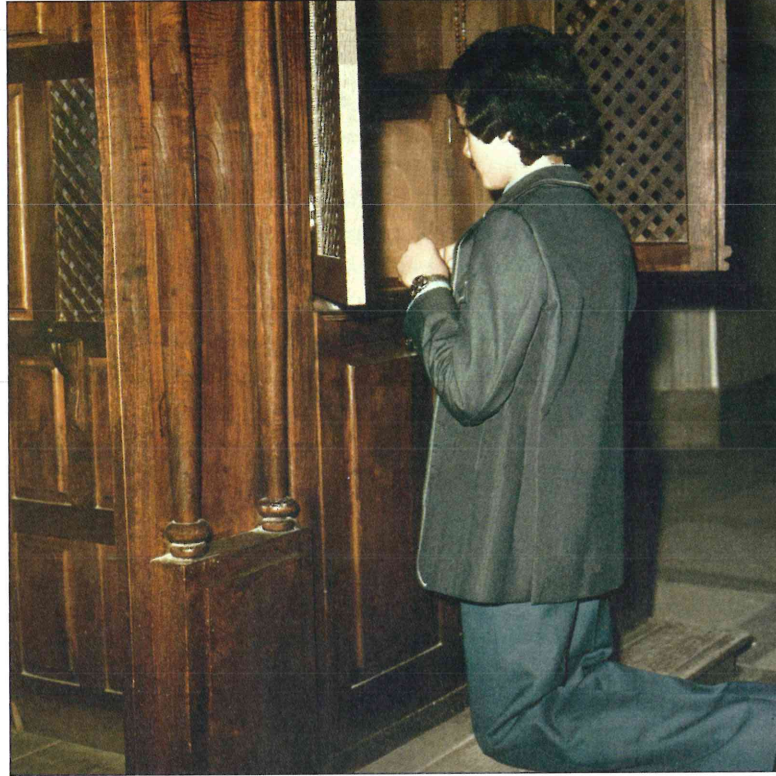


The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving, in which the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is perpetually re-presented. Christ himself offers the sacrifice; the priests are Christ’s ministers through whom all the faithful take part in the Eucharistic sacrifice; “they offer the divine victim to God and offer themselves along with him.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus himself taught that the consecrated bread and wine are really, not just symbolically, his body and blood.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever. (Jn 6: 53-58)

This doctrine, that the bread and wine change into the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, is called *transubstantiation*—which is a Latin word that simply means the true being of the bread and wine becomes the true being of Jesus Christ, really present on the altar.



## Penance

**A**s Christians, we know that we are sinners. Although baptism washes away our sins, it does not make us perfect. We still sin, even after baptism, and we still need forgiveness for those sins. After he rose from the dead, Jesus spent his remaining time on earth preparing his apostles to lead his Church. Part of that preparation was giving them all his power and authority, holding nothing back—including the authority to forgive sins.

**And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn 20: 22-23)**

Venial sin harms our relationship with God while mortal sin breaks that communion. The only way to restore that communion when it is broken is through God’s forgiveness. And all we have to do to receive that forgiveness is to confess our sins honestly with contrition and ask that they be forgiven.

**Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. (Jas 5: 16)**

Because Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive and retain sins, the Church uses that power to bring Christians back into a right relationship with God. Only a priest who has received the authority from the Church can pronounce the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name.





## Anointing Of The Sick

**Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (Jas 5: 14-15)**

Jesus Christ left his healing power to his disciples, and anointing with oil was always part of the healing ritual.

**And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them. (Mk 6:13)**

The Church continues to exercise that healing power today by anointing the sick through the ministry of a priest. Nevertheless, we must remember that physical healing is not always part of God's plan. Even St. Paul, who was famous for healings and even raised a man from the dead, was not healed when he prayed to be rid of the "thorn" that tormented him. Instead, Christ gave him this answer to his prayers: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."<sup>4</sup>

When our prayers for healing seem not to be answered, we should remember that suffering for Christ is a privilege. Through the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, our sufferings share in the suffering of Jesus on the cross. When we are near death, the sacrament prepares us to face that final struggle with strength and grace.



## Holy Orders

**S**ome Christian men are called to dedicate their lives more completely to the service of Christ's Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders consecrates a man for service in the sacramental governing order of the Church.

There are three levels of ordained ministry in the Church: deacon, priest, and bishop.

**Bishop** comes from a Greek word meaning "supervisor."

**Priest** comes from a Greek word meaning "elder."

**Deacon** comes from a Greek word meaning "helper."

The beginnings of all three degrees of service can already be seen in the New Testament.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is chosen to be one of the first "deacons."

James, as we just read, advises the sick to "call for the elders of the Church." The word translated "elders" is the word in Greek from which the English "priests" is derived.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul describes the job of a bishop as caring for God's Church.

In the sacrament of Holy Orders, the bishop lays his hands on the "ordinand" (the person receiving the sacrament) and prays that God will pour out his Holy Spirit, with the gifts of the Spirit that will be needed for the ordinand's ministry. The ordained priest is enabled to act in the person of Christ, the head, shepherd and bridegroom of his Church.

**The sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred by the laying on of hands followed by a solemn prayer of consecration asking God to grant the ordinand the graces of the Holy Spirit required for his ministry. Ordination imprints an indelible sacramental character. (CCC 1597)**

## Matrimony

**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gn 1: 27)**

From the beginning of creation, human beings were created male and female. Their mission was to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

In the story of Adam and Eve, God brings the animals to Adam one by one, but none of them is a suitable companion. Finally woman is created from the same stuff as man, and Adam recognizes that she is the same as he is: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...”<sup>5</sup>

Then the sacred author explains:

**Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gn 2: 24)**

Marriage—the union of a man and a woman—is part of the original creation. And at the other end of the Bible, we find heaven described as a wedding banquet:

**Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready...<sup>6</sup>**

When Jesus Christ began his ministry, his first public miracle was changing water into wine at a wedding feast. By joining the celebration, Christ showed not only that marriage is good but that he will be present in it.

In marriage, a man and a woman “become one flesh,” and that union is meant to be permanent. Although the Law of Moses made provision for divorce, Jesus Christ reminded us that “from the beginning it was not so.”

**“By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God” (LG 11 § 2). This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple’s love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they “help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children” (LG 11 § 2; cf. LG 41). (CCC 1641)**

**Christ is the source of this grace.** “Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony” (GS 48 § 2). Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5: 21; cf. Gal 6: 2), and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb:

**How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father?...How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.<sup>7</sup> (CCC 1642)**

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

**Tertullian: Prescription Against Heresies**

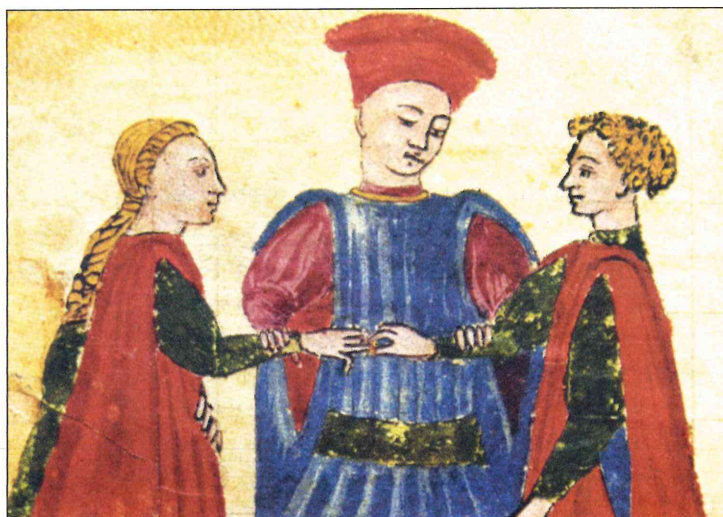
*Chapter 21: All Doctrine True Which Comes Through the Church from the Apostles, Who Were Taught by God Through Christ. All Opinion Which Has No Such Divine Origin and Apostolic Tradition to Show, Is Ipso Facto False.*

From this, therefore, do we draw up our rule. Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for “no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach—that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached—in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them—can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles rounded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both *viva voce*, as the phrase is, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches—those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly

containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God. Whereas all doctrine must be prejudged as false which savors of contrariety to the truth of the churches and apostles of Christ and God. It remains, then, that we demonstrate whether this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles, and whether all other *doctrines* do not *ipso facto* proceed from falsehood. We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different *from theirs*. This is our witness of truth.

**Tertullian, On Baptism, ch. 8:**

For just as, after the waters of the deluge, by which the old iniquity was purged—after the baptism, so to say, of the world—a *dove* was the herald which announced to the earth the assuagement of celestial wrath, when she had been sent her way out of the ark, and had returned with the olive-branch, a sign which even among the nations is the fore-token of *peace*; so by the self-same law of heavenly effect, to earth—that is, to our flesh—as it emerges from the font, after its old sins flies the *dove* of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the peace of God, sent out from the heavens where is the Church, the typified ark.



In marriage, a man and a woman “become one flesh,” and that union is meant to be permanent.

## VOCABULARY

### **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

One of the seven sacraments. It heals and forgives sins.

### **BAPTISM**

One of the seven sacraments. It washed away the guilt associated with Original Sin.

### **CONFIRMATION**

One of the seven sacraments. It conveys the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was given to the apostles at Pentecost.

### **COUNCIL**

A meeting of Church leaders. The Council of Jerusalem described in Acts is the Scriptural prototype of a council of the whole Church. The most recent ecumenical council was the Second Vatican Council.

### **DEACON**

A man who is ordained to assist the mission of the Church. From the Greek for “helper.”

### **EUCCHARIST**

One of the seven sacraments. It is the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ.

### **HOLY ORDERS**

One of the seven sacraments. It ordains a man to a life of serving the Church.

### **MARRIAGE.**

See Matrimony.

### **MATRIMONY**

One of the seven sacraments. It binds a man and woman in a lifelong covenant.

### **MIDDLE AGES**

In the West, the period between the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Renaissance. The Church was frequently the only force that preserved order.

### **PASCHAL MYSTERY**

Christ’s work of redemption accomplished principally by his Passion, death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension, whereby, “dying he destroyed our death, rising he restored our life” (CCC 1067; cf. 654). The Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present in the liturgy of the Church, and its saving effects are communicated through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which renews the paschal sacrifice of Christ as the sacrifice offered by the Church (CCC 571, 1362-1372).

### **PRIMACY**

The highest rank. The Acts of the Apostles shows the “primacy” of St. Peter, that is, it shows he had the highest rank among the apostles.

### **RECONCILIATION**

One of the seven sacraments. It forgives the guilt associated with sins.

### **SACRAMENT**

An outward sign instituted by Jesus Christ to confer the grace indicated by the sign.

Through the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, our sufferings share in the suffering of Jesus on the cross.



## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who is at the roots of the Church's organization?
2. When was the Hierarchy of the Church developed?
3. Whom do the twelve apostles represent?
4. When did Christ make St. Peter the head of the apostles?
5. When did St. Peter begin to act as leader of the Church?
6. What does the word "apostle" mean?
7. What is the purpose of Church Councils?
8. What was the first council of the whole Church?
9. What is a sacrament?
10. Who instituted the sacraments?
11. Name the seven sacraments.
12. What sacrament does Confirmation complete?
13. What does the confirmand receive?
14. Who offers the sacrifice of the Eucharist?
15. What is *transubstantiation*?
16. Where does the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick have its roots?
17. Name the three levels of ordained ministry in the Church.
18. How is marriage a part of the original creation?
19. What is the union of marriage?
20. What is the special gift of Matrimony?

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. "In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way the *judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin" (cf. 1 Cor 5: 11; Gal 5: 19-21; Rv 22: 15) (CCC 1470). This quote is referring to the sacrament of Penance. What main point is the quote trying to get across? How are we to stay on the road of conversion?
2. Scripture teaches us that the sacrament of Confirmation brings the gifts of the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost. If you have been confirmed, what have you done with those gifts since your Confirmation? If you haven't been confirmed yet, how have you used the gifts God has given you to prepare yourself for Confirmation and your life of service to him?
3. There are people who do not believe in *transubstantiation*. If challenged, how would you defend your belief in the complete and true Divine Presence in the Eucharist, instead of only symbolic body and blood?

## FROM THE CATECHISM

**552** Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve (cf. Mk 3: 16; 9: 2; Lk 24: 34; 1 Cor 15: 5); Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Our Lord then declared to him: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Mt 16: 18). Christ, the “living Stone” (1 Pt 2: 4), thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it (cf. Lk 22: 32).

**756** “Often, too, the Church is called the *building* of God. The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles 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; the dwelling-place of God among men; 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. 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” (LG 6; cf. 1 Cor 3: 9; Mt 21: 42 and parallels; Acts 4: 11; 1 Pt 2: 7; Ps 118: 22; 1 Cor 3: 11; 1 Tm 3: 15; Eph 2: 19-22; Rv 21: 3; 1 Pt 2: 5; Rv 21: 1-2).

**769** “The Church... will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven,” (LG 48) at the time of Christ’s glorious return. Until that day, “the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world’s persecutions and God’s consolations” (St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 18, 51: PL 41, 614; cf. LG 8). Here below she knows

that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming of the Kingdom, when she will “be united in glory with her king” (LG 5; cf. 6; 2 Cor 5: 6). The Church, and through her the world, will not be perfected in glory without great trials. Only then will “all the just from the time of Adam, ‘from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,’... be gathered together in the universal Church in the Father’s presence” (LG 2).

**816** “The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it... This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him” (LG 8 § 2).

The Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism* explains: “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God” (*Unitatis redintegratio* 3 § 55).

**819** “Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth” (LG 8 § 2) are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: “the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements” (*Unitatis redintegratio* 3 § 2; cf. LG 15). Christ’s Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these

FROM THE CATECHISM *continued*

blessings come from Christ and lead to him, (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 3) and are in themselves calls to “Catholic unity” (cf. LG 8).

**1076** The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the “dispensation of the mystery” the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, “until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls “the sacramental economy”; this is the communication (or “dispensation”) of the fruits of Christ’s Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church’s “sacramental” liturgy.

**1084** “Seated at the right hand of the Father” and pouring out the Holy Spirit on his Body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate

his grace. The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify.

**1088** “To accomplish so great a work”—the dispensation or communication of his work of salvation—“Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,’ but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them’” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7; Mt 18: 20).



*The Baptism of St. Francis*

Endnotes

1. For this illustration, we have used the literal rendering “the gates of Hades,” given in a footnote in the Revised Standard Version.
2. Glossary in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
3. LG 11.
4. 2 Cor 12: 9.
5. Gn 2: 23.
6. Rv 19: 6-7.
7. Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*. 2, 8, 6-7: PL 1, 1412-1413; cf. FC 13.