

## Lesson 7A: The Church

When we say: One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church, we mean the Orthodox Church and no other. Where do we get this from? Fathers of 1st Ecumenical Council, Creed, Liturgy.

At every Liturgy and at the morning services we sing and read the Creed, in which we confess that we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

### Unity, One

There is 1 Church. We speak of the communion of the saints. The Saints are One, they are united in the one body of Christ which is the Church. We also speak of the Unity of God the Holy Trinity. 3 persons in 1 nature. *The Church similarly is a multitude of persons, but a unity of the grace of God.* Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: It is one as viewed from within itself, not divided; It is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. "There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called, in one hope of your, calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6)." The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the mystical life in sanctity, ie the services and sacraments. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of people; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly by means of words, the faith of Christ. More than any other aspect of the Church, the close bond between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of Christ in heaven distinguishes the Orthodox Church from all other Christian confessions. For how can one speak of a single body if its members are not in harmony one with another? -- Not only with those present bodily in the Church today, but with those who have gone before and who now belong to the Church triumphant. The Apostle Paul instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: "*You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 12:22-24).*" We are not separated from our dead brothers in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: they are close to us in God, *for all live in Him (Luke 20:38).*

The Church sings this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord:

O Christ our God, when you completed Your mission for our salvation and united the earthly with the heavenly, then You ascended in glory, not being parted from us but remaining with us, and crying to those who love You: 'I am with you, and no one shall be against you.'

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ is the main subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross when the Lord prayed *that they all may be one* (John 17:21).

Unity in God the Holy Trinity is unity in Truth, for God is Truth. The unity of the Christian Church must be unity in the Truth of God. Christ is the divine Word of the Father. He is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14: 6) He is “the Light of the world.” (John 8: 12) Christ sends the Holy Spirit, Who is also “the Truth,” to men. (I John 5: 6) The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father” (John 15: 26) Who comes to guide men “into all truth.” (John 16: 13) The Church of Christ is “the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.” (I Timothy 3: 15) The Church is the “chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people” whom God “has called...out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (I Peter 2: 9) The Church is the vessel of divine truth in and for the world. There is no Christian unity outside of the truth, for outside of the truth there is no Church, no salvation, no eternal life. God the Father is He “Who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim 2: 4) and has sent His Son into the world to make Himself known. The truth of God is unchanging and eternal. God is eternal and in Him is “no variableness, neither shadow or turning.” (James 1: 17) He is the “King eternal.” (I Timothy 1: 17) Jesus Christ is the “true God and eternal life.” (I John 5: 20) He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13: 8) The Lord Jesus Christ has said that His teachings will never change. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Mark 13: 31)

### **Catholic & Apostolic**

The Holy Spirit came to the apostles of Christ, so that they could make disciples of all nations and teach all men that which Jesus Himself had taught them. “Go therefore and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28: 19 – 20) The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of Christ, which is the teaching of God. The apostles did not make their own doctrines, but proclaimed “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life...” (I John 1: 1) The Apostle Paul witnesses in the same way, when he says “the gospel which was preached by me is not from man, for I neither received it from man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1: 11 – 12) The apostles urged all Christians to “teach no other doctrine” (I Timothy 1: 3) and to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1: 3) No apostle, no saint, no father of the Church, no martyr, confessor or inspired Church council ever claimed to have another teaching than that of Christ Himself. The doctrinal truth of the apostolic Church is the eternal and unchanging Truth of God Himself, made known in Christ and the Holy Spirit. This truth is always the same. It never changes. It abides in the Church in every age and generation, handed down from time to time and from place to place in the Holy Tradition of the Church (Holiness).

The task of Christians always and everywhere is to receive, to express, to explain, and to pass on the true Christian Gospel, changing nothing in it, adding nothing to it, and taking nothing from it (Catholic). For the Orthodox Church, therefore, the only possible unity for Christians and for the Christian Church is the unity of faith to which the

apostles, saints and councils of the Church have witnessed, the faith to which they call all men for the sake of their salvation. The meaning of Holy Tradition in the Church is that the entire spiritual treasury given to men by God in Christ and the Spirit is given over wholly and perfectly to all believers in all times and places. The apostles severely condemned any form of Christianity other than that which they received from the Lord. The Apostle Paul said *anathema* to any man-made religion, claiming that those who distorted the Gospel and fashioned their own doctrines are “self-condemned.” (Galatians 1: 9 and Titus 3: 11) The apostles forbade communion with those who distorted the Gospel and removed them from the Church. Such serious action was taken because in every case the mutations of the Christian Faith threaten man’s salvation and destroy unity, since they are merely “human doctrines” having only “an appearance of wisdom.” (Colossians 2: 22 – 23) Holy Scripture tells us that the Church will always suffer from false prophets and false teachers, but that the faithful Church will exist to the end of the world, until the glorious coming of Christ. For Christians, therefore, there is no greater sin than the betrayal of the Gospel of Christ and the distortion of the apostolic teaching. To be guilty of this sin is to be guilty of betraying God Himself and the entire life of the church. Christian unity and the unity of the Christian Church can be only in the perfect unity of those doctrines which our fathers in the faith have called *divine*. Woe to us if we betray Christ, Who is our Truth!

**The Church is obviously holy as the body of Christ.**

**The Church is Catholic.** This word does not mean Roman Catholic. We mean 'Catholic' in the original sense of the word. 'Catholic' means that which is believed and practiced the same in all places and at all times. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Likewise, His Body, the Church, proclaims the same faith, adheres to the same dogmas and performs the same Mysteries as those instituted by the Apostles and preserved by God's grace through the members of the Church to the present day.

**The Church is Apostolic,** because it is founded upon the apostles and we share in the same Faith and Tradition as the Apostles.

### **Apostolic Sees & Jurisdictions**

To the group of Churches founded by the Apostles themselves belong the five Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Rome. The Church of Constantinople was founded by St. Andrew, the Church of Alexandria by St. Mark, the Church of Antioch by St. Paul, the Church of Jerusalem by St. Peter and St. James, and the Church of Rome by St. Peter and St. Paul. Those founded in later years through missionary activity of the first Churches were the Churches of Sinai, Russia, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, Rumania and many more.

All of these churches are independent in their administration, yet they are in full communion with one another with the exception of the Church of Rome which separated in the year 1054. In faith, doctrine, Apostolic tradition, sacraments, liturgies and services they are exactly alike. Regardless of the language of each, they exist in fellowship and together constitute and call themselves the Orthodox Church.

Follow up: Creed: Christ's Church (Yoiutube Video from the Youtube Channel: Catechetical School of Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church)