

LESSON 25: THE CHURCH (THE FINAL COVENANT)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 8	:	Cover points 1 to 20
For Intermediate Level / Age 11	:	Cover points 1 to 23
For Advanced Level / Age 14	:	Cover points 1 to 26

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was violently tortured and killed by crucifixion in order to save us from our sins, rose again from the dead. After being with His disciples for 40 days to help them to understand everything that had happened, He returned to heaven. In this lesson, we will learn about how Jesus established the Church and made her His Bride, and that the Church continues in His mission to save humanity.

Current lesson:

1. Upon drinking the “fourth cup” of the Passover meal on the cross, John 19:30 records that Jesus exclaimed “τετέλεσται” (*tetelestai*). These words were translated by Saint Jerome into Latin in the 5th century as *consummatum est* (“It is consummated”). The use of the term “consummated” indicates that there was a union/marriage that took place.
2. On the cross, Jesus united the Church to Himself. The Church is the Bride of Christ. The cross, more than being a place of sacrifice, was the nuptial bed between Christ and His Bride, the Church.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (in *Sermo Suppositus* 120): “Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from His chamber...He came to the marriage-bed of the cross, and there in mounting it, He consummated His marriage. And when He perceived the sighs of the creature, He lovingly gave Himself up to the torment in place of His bride, and joined Himself to [her] forever.”

CCC 795: “Christ and his Church thus together make up the ‘whole Christ’ (*Christus totus*). The Church is one with Christ.”

3. Right from the beginning of Sacred Scripture, it is shown that God uses the imagery of marriage as a means to reveal His plan for the whole of humanity. Marriage was God’s plan from the beginning. To the people of the First Covenant (Israel), He reveals that they are espoused to Him in marriage. In the fullness of time, He sent His Son, the Bridegroom, to espouse Himself to His Church, the New Israel.
4. The mission given by Christ to His Bride, the Church, is to continue faithfully with His work of saving mankind. *Lumen Gentium* 48 calls the Church “the universal sacrament of salvation”, since Christ, who “is continually active in the world”, leads all people to the



Church so that He may “join them more closely to Himself”. She is the divinely instituted means of giving grace to all.

CCC 845: “To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son’s Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is ‘the world reconciled.’ She is that bark which ‘in the full sail of the Lord’s cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world.’ According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah’s ark, which alone saves from the flood.”

5. Jesus had given four important characteristics/marks to this Church that He had established. The Church is ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, and APOSTOLIC.
6. **One.** The Church is one for three reasons (CCC 813):
 - A) Her source is the Holy Trinity, a perfect unity of three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
 - B) Her founder is Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile all mankind through the blood of the cross;
 - C) The Holy Spirit dwells in the souls of the faithful and unites all of the faithful into one communion of believers, and guides the Church.
7. Jesus established only one Church, not a collection of differing churches. Scripture says the Church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-32). Jesus can have only one spouse, and his spouse is the Catholic Church that He Himself established.

Being one is not a loose collection of parts, it’s an organic whole. It has a head, voice, heart, hands, and feet. The head is the Holy Father (the pope), who guides the Church with the mind of Christ. The voice is the Sacred Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. At the heart of the Church are the Sacraments, which nourish the body of the Church. The hands and feet are each of us, who reach out to the world and take with us the love of God.

8. The oneness of the Church is visible.
 - A) We are visibly united in our Creeds and our other teachings. The Church teaches just one set of doctrines, which must be the same as those taught by the Apostles (Jude 3). This is the unity of belief to which Scripture calls us (Philippians 1:27, 2:2).

Although some Catholics dissent from officially-taught doctrines, the Church’s official teachers – the pope and the bishops united with him – have never changed any doctrine. Over the centuries, as doctrines are examined more fully, the Church comes to understand them more deeply (John 16:12- 13), but it never understands them to mean the opposite of what they once meant.

- B) We are also visibly united in our celebration of the Sacraments, and the hierarchical structure based on the apostolic succession preserved and handed on through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Our Sacraments are administered by priests who are united



to their bishops, who are in turn united to the Holy Father, the pope, who is the successor of St Peter.

9. In our oneness, we do find diversity. The faithful bear witness to many different vocations and many different gifts, but work together to continue the mission of our Lord. The various cultures and traditions enrich our Church in their expressions of one faith. In all, charity must permeate the Church, for it is through charity that the members are bound together and work together in harmonious unity.
10. Besides the Latin Rite, which is the largest Rite of the Catholic Church, there are also 23 Eastern Churches (grouped into at least six different rites) that are in full communion with the Pope. These are called Eastern Catholic Churches and are equally a part of the Universal Catholic Church, although they look somewhat different from the Latin Rite in their way of worship and cultural expressions. However, all our Creeds and Sacraments are the same.
11. **Holy.** By His Grace, Jesus makes the Church holy, just as He is holy. The Church, which is made holy by Christ, is the source of holiness and is the guardian of the special means of grace that Jesus established, the Sacraments (refer to Ephesians 5:26).

Christ sanctifies the Church, and in turn, through Him and with Him, the Church is His agent of sanctification (holiness). Through the ministry of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit, our Lord pours forth abundant graces, especially through the Sacraments. Therefore, through her teaching, prayer and worship, and good works, the Church is a visible sign of holiness.

Lumen Gentium, 14: “The one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in His body which is the Church.”

12. This does not mean that all the members of the Church are holy. The Church is not a home for saints; it is a hospital for sinners. Jesus said there would be both good and bad members in the Church (John 6:70), and not all the members would go to heaven (Matthew 7:21-23).

But God’s ultimate desire for His Church is that she becomes perfectly holy. Pope Benedict XVI, in a catechesis on the Church, stated that Christ’s giving up of His life for His Bride was “the greatest possible demonstration of love”. He remarked, “What greater sign of love could there be than this”. He went on to say of the Church, that Christ “is concerned for her beauty; not just the beauty acquired through Baptism, but also the beauty that must grow every day through a life of irreproachable moral behaviour, without spot or blemish”. He wants His Bride to be holy.

13. Each member of the Church is also called to holiness. Through baptism, we have been freed from Original Sin, filled with sanctifying grace, plunged into the mystery of our Lord’s passion, death, and resurrection, and incorporated into His Church, which is “the holy people of God”. By God’s grace, we are called to strive for holiness.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is Holy and He has called us to holiness in Him, through His Body. We are called into communion with Him through the community of believers, by the



Sacraments, by the preaching of the Gospel message, by praying and being prayed for, and by forgiving and being forgiven.

Unitatis Redintegratio, 4: “Every Catholic must therefore aim at Christian perfection and, each according to his station, play his part, that the Church, which bears in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus, may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to Himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle.”

14. **Catholic.** The term “catholic” means “universal”. The word “catholic” was first used in reference to the Church by St Ignatius of Antioch in the year 108 AD (in his *Letter to the Smyrnaens*). Around the year 175 AD, Irenaeus of Lyons used this term.
15. The Gnostics believed that Christ had two messages: the first (Exoteric Christianity) was the message preached to ordinary men who could only understand a very simple message; the second (Esoteric Christianity) was told only to a chosen few who had shown themselves worthy of the message. In disputing with the Gnostics (who claimed that their false teaching was the “real Gospel”), Irenaeus replied that Christians have never had a secret doctrine in the Gnostic sense. He argued that Christ had no secrets from the twelve, the twelve accepted Paul as one of themselves and that Paul and the twelve were under strict command to pass on all they had received.
16. The Church is Catholic because the same full Gospel is preached everywhere. For over 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has carried out this mission, preaching the good news that Christ died for all men and that he wants all of us to be members of his universal family (Galatians 3:28).
17. The Church on earth is called the Church militant, and she is united to the Church triumphant in Heaven and the Church suffering in Purgatory. The Church is therefore Catholic also in the sense that there is a communion of saints, the union of the faithful in Heaven, in Purgatory, and on earth.
18. **Apostolic.** The Church that Jesus founded is apostolic because He appointed the Apostles to be the first leaders of the Church, and their successors were to be its future leaders. The Apostles were the first bishops, and, since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of Catholic bishops faithfully handing on what the Apostles taught the first Christians in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (2 Timothy 2:2). This unbroken line of succession is called apostolic succession.

No bishop, priest, or deacon in the Church is self-ordained or self-proclaimed; rather, he is called by the Church and ordained into the apostolic ministry given by our Lord to His Church to be exercised in union with the Pope.

19. The Church is also apostolic in the sense that the deposit of faith found in both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition was preserved, taught, and handed on by the Apostles. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Sacred Magisterium (the teaching authority entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and their successors) has the duty to



preserve, teach, defend, and hand on the deposit of faith. Moreover, the Holy Spirit protects the Church from error in its teaching authority.

20. The four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) are fully realised only in the Catholic Church. While other Christian churches and communities may accept and profess the Creed, and possess elements of truth and holiness, only the Catholic Church reflects the fullness of these four marks.

Lumen Gentium, 8: “This Church [which Christ founded], constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.”

Unitatis Redintegratio, 3: “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help towards salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”

21. Why does Saint Paul call the Church the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)? It is precisely because she has been enjoined to Christ through His sacrifice on the cross. It was on the cross that the consummation took place, making Christ and the Church become one. This is why Saint Augustine of Hippo (4th century) called Christ and the Church “the whole Christ” (*Christus totus*). When the Church celebrates the Liturgy (or the Mass), it is an “‘action’ of the whole Christ” (CCC 1136).

Since the Church is a part of Christ, she must share in His mission of saving the world. Although Jesus has returned to the Father, the Church continues with this mission. If the Church was to continue with Christ’s mission, He had to introduce her to the world first. And Jesus had a very special way of introducing His Bride to the world. This happened on the day of Pentecost.

22. Read Acts 1:4-9 and 2:1-40. Pentecost was a spectacular event. Because Jesus, prior to His ascension into Heaven, had instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem, the Apostles together with other disciples (120 of them in total, including Jesus’ own mother, Mary) stayed put in Jerusalem. There, they spent time “constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14).

Then Pentecost day came. Pentecost, which means “fiftieth” fell 50 days after the Passover. During Pentecost, the Jews would celebrate *Shavu’ot*, a feast commemorating the giving of the Ten Commandments from God to Moses on Mount Sinai. It was one of the three feasts that all Jewish men were bound to observe in the city of Jerusalem (Exodus 23:14-17; the other two compulsory feasts were the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles). This means that Pentecost was a celebration of God’s covenant with Israel. Now, this was about seven days after Jesus’ ascension. Suddenly, where the disciples were gathered, a loud sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind. Tongues of fire appeared and came upon them.

They began going into the streets and speaking, not in languages that nobody could understand, but rather, languages that many visitors to Jerusalem could understand although these visitors were not Hebrew-speaking Jews. Scripture records that “each one



was bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language” (Acts 2:6). Peter, the first Pope of the Church, delivered his first public homily at this time, assuring the people that the disciples were not drunk, but rather, filled with the Holy Spirit. On this day, 3,000 people were Baptised following his sermon (Acts 2:41).

23. The Feast of Pentecost celebrates this special day of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Christ’s Church. There are a few important points on the significance of this occasion:

A) God was making it possible for the mission of the Church to begin in obedience to Christ’s instruction to His Apostles to “make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

B) In Genesis, when the descendants of Noah wanted to build the Tower of Babel to pit their power against God’s power, God had to disunite them by making them speak in different languages so that they could not understand one another (Genesis 11:1-9). Unity in sin would pose a great danger to the existence of mankind. But now, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ would unite people into His Church through His holiness. The differences in language was now no longer a barrier to the unity of mankind in the love and holiness of Christ.

C) The Church’s experience of the Pentecost is a reflection of how the public ministry of Jesus began. When He began His public ministry, Jesus was baptised in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit came upon Him. In the same way, the Church was enjoined to Christ on the cross, and 50 days later on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon her when it was time for her to publicly continue with the ministry of Christ, her Groom.

CCC 767: “When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church.’ Then ‘the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun.’ As the ‘convocation’ of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them.”

24. Pope Francis, in echoing the Second Vatican Council, taught that the Church is not a static reality, but that she continually journeys throughout history to the final and marvellous goal, which is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven.

25. The kingdom of God began with Christ’s death and Resurrection and must be further extended by the Church until it has been brought into perfection by Christ at the end of time. The ultimate triumph of this kingdom will take place when Christ returns to earth at the end of time, that is, when the Bridegroom and the Bride will be reunited for eternity, celebrating the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

26. The kingdom of Heaven is when the Bride of Christ, the Holy Church, enjoys eternal communion with the Holy Trinity in fullness. This has been the destiny of mankind from

the dawn of creation. From the beginning, God created the world so that the Church might be established from among the inhabitants of this world.

CCC 760: “Christians of the first centuries said, ‘The world was created for the sake of the Church.’ God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the ‘convocation’ of men in Christ, and this ‘convocation’ is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things, and God permitted such painful upheavals as the angels’ fall and man’s sin only as occasions and means for displaying all the power of his arm and the whole measure of the love he wanted to give the world: Just as God’s will is creation and is called ‘the world,’ so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called ‘the Church.’”



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