

# The History of the Church

## 1. JESUS CALLED US TO BE PART OF A COMMUNITY –

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW Jesus taught us to be part of a community:

- a. **Jesus himself went regularly to religious services (Luke 4:16):** “He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, *and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day...*”
  1. **Jesus, from the start, made his disciples a community. He became FRIENDS with the disciples.**
  2. **And he called his disciples to be friends with one another:** The early Christians even held all material things in common (Acts 2:44) and gathered every day for mass and to pray together in their homes (Acts 2:46).
  3. And he said felt that “**...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them** (Mt. 18:20).”
  4. **And he asked the disciples to gather in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper** (Mt 26:26-29, Mk 14:22-25, Lk 22:15-20).

## 2. JESUS ALSO WANTED THERE TO BE A UNITED CHURCH NOT JUST A LOT OF LOCAL GROUPS –

- a. **Jesus himself chose leadership for this Church and said that the Church would survive until he returned in glory.** Jesus said to St. Peter: *Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! I tell you, you are Peter, and on the rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven* (Mt 16:16 -19.)
- b. **ST. PAUL AND ST. PETER SHOW THAT THEY TOOK SERIOUSLY THAT THEY WERE PART OF A UNITED, UNIVERSAL CHURCH THROUGH THE “COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM.”**
- c. **Specifically, we see in the accounts of the “Council of Jerusalem”** (Gal. 2:1-10 and Acts 14:1-22) that, in the early Church when there were disagreements, the members of the Church felt that they needed to come up with a common course of action for the whole Church. We see, in these Scripture passages, that they came together in this council to pray and deliberate about how to handle the issues of gentiles becoming Christians. St. Paul and St. Peter had very different opinions about how to do this, and there were different “CAMPS,” but we see an underlying assumption, from the Bible, that all assumed that there needed to be UNITY in the Church. The Book of Acts also mentions that the “apostles and the presbyters” prayed about these issues together.
  - i. **So, St. Paul takes seriously that the apostles had a ROLE to hand on the TEACHINGS OF JESUS in a special way.** He writes

that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph 2:19-22), that their eyewitness testimony is the basis of our faith, that their teaching is the basis of our doctrine (beliefs) and practice.

- ii. **The Book of Revelation even lists the the names of the apostles as being written on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, which is the Lamb's bride (the church.)**

## EARLIEST HISTORY OF THE CHURCH --

1. **Development of Church leadership: All members have gifts, But there are also certain jobs in the early Church which we still have today. So, to start, all members of the Church have gifts to share with the Church, as we hear in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: *Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?* All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they (1 Cor 12:12-31)? But we also see certain jobs develop in the early Church which we still have today:**

- a. **DEACONS: In Acts, the role of deacon (Acts 6:1-8) directly stems from the need for the apostles to have help in serving God's people. We also see deacons baptizing in Acts 8:38. The deacons are "installed" through the "apostles" who "prayed and laid their hands on them" – which is what happens in an "ordination" of deacons in our own time.**
- b. **BISHOPS: In the First Letter of Paul to Timothy (which was written around 66AD) the heads of local Eucharistic-centered communities are called "bishops" (1 Tim 3:1-7, 1 Tim 3:8-13.)**
  - i. **AROUND THE TIME THE APOSTLES WERE PASSING AWAY, THE OFFICE OF BISHOP CAME TO BE PRESENT IN EACH SIGNIFICANT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. THEY WERE CLEARLY SEEN AS INHERITING THE ROLE OF THE APOSTLES.**
- c. **PRESBYTERS/ELDERS: We see "presbyters" in Acts 14:23 and Acts 20:17 where it says that "presbyters" were being appointed to lead each local parish. They are also mentioned in Acts 15 as being at the Council of Jerusalem where these individuals helped to make decisions with the apostles. The official title of "priests" in the Church today is "presbyter."**
  - i. **Some Bibles call "presbyters" ELDERS. "Presbyter" is just the Greek word for Elder.**
  - ii. **The official title for a "priest" in the Church is presbyter.**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MASS IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND HOW

## THEY CELEBRATED THE MASS --

1. Mass was important in the Early Church. **They celebrated Mass at least every week.** (1 Cor. 11:23-25.)
2. Until 85 AD some followers of Jesus would go to synagogue services on Saturday (they thought of themselves as Jewish, but people who followed Jesus as well) and then to “the Lord’s Supper” at dawn on Sunday (that’s when the Lord had risen.)
  - After 85 AD followers of Jesus stopped attending the synagogue and there was a real sense of separation among followers of Jesus and the Jewish community. When this happened, they basically added the equivalent of a synagogue service (our “Liturgy of the Word” with readings, sung psalms, etc.) to the Lord’s Supper – which is how we get the set-up of the Mass.
3. **The early Christians said that the Eucharist was central to their faith in many manuscripts from saints and leaders of the Church in the first generations.** St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was a bishop of Antioch, in what is now Turkey, wrote, around the year 100 AD, *Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God’s Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan’s powers are overthrown....* St. Ignatius also wrote, in a letter to the people of Ephesus from 100AD: *“Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God’s Eucharist and to praise him.”*
4. **The Eucharist, within a few years, after Jesus ascending into heaven, was organized into something similar to the modern mass, and was perceived by the people of those earliest Christian communities as being an experience of receiving the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.** This is shown in an early document, “The Didache,” from, perhaps 70AD. It is also shown in “The First Apology of St. Justin, Martyr” from 150AD, which includes a description of typical Sunday worship:
 

*...On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place... and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the presider in a discourse urges and invites us to the imitation of these nobler things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. On finishing the prayers we greet each other with a kiss. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the presider similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution, and reception of the consecrated elements by each one, takes place and they are sent to the absent by the deacons. Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as much as he chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the presider, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us, and briefly, he is the protector of all in need. We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which... Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead....*

**About the bread and wine being the Body and Blood of Christ, the same document says,** *This food we call Eucharist... we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but...we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer...is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus (ch. 66).*

“The Creed” was not put together until the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and began to be recited during the mass a few centuries later.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BELIEFS OF THE EARLY CHURCH -- SCRIPTURE

**The New Testament was put together around the year 350AD.** In the time right after Jesus died and rose again, a number of writings were circulated. There were the main Gospels we know of today, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and also letters like those of St. Paul. And it was a little different from place to place. Then the bishops from every region decided to make a general list for the whole Church.

It is worth adding, though, that there were some “gospels” written long after the ones we know of today. These are the “gospels” made popular by the DAN BROWN books (The Da Vinci Code) like the Gospel of Thomas. These books were all written in Egypt long after the time of the apostles or the other Gospels or Letters of the Bible – about 100 years afterwards. And while M, M, L and J were written by the people who knew Jesus personally and were written, often, FOR the people who had personally experienced his ministry among them – Gospels like “Thomas” were written by a group of individuals collectively known as the “Gnostics.” They felt that God had given them special revelations which they wrote down without being actual personal witnesses themselves. The Church never accepted these “gospels” into the Bible.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPTURE TO CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH: The writings of the Church leaders from this time describe a great devotion to Scripture. St. Jerome wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. that “ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.”** This dependence on Scripture is one which our Church is rediscovering in recent decades: Largely in thanks to the witness of our Protestant/Evangelical brothers and sisters.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BELIEFS OF THE EARLY CHURCH – CHURCH COUNCILS --

During the first few centuries of the Church, we also had many CHURCH COUNCILS. The TEACHINGS OF THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH still constitute the highest level of Church teaching. The first council was the Council of Jerusalem, which is actually discussed in the Bible.

It is worth noting that a lot of beliefs that ALL Christians have owe themselves to the councils (for example: Our beliefs about the Trinity.)

All the Councils of the Church show that the members of the Church always saw themselves as UNITED: That even though there were (and always have been) disagreements in the Church, they always wanted to get everybody on the same page.

They always saw themselves as ONE Body in Christ – one Church.

The belief statement produced by the Council of Nicea (325AD) is the one we say at every Sunday mass. But there were many councils in this period.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BELIEFS OF THE EARLY CHURCH --

### **AMONG THE BISHOPS, THE BISHOP OF ROME TAKES ON A SPECIAL ROLE:** St.

Peter was made the “rock” onto which the Church would be built. This was said by Jesus. Also, in the Acts of the Apostles we can see that St. Peter was seen as having the job of heading the early Church, even while the “apostles and overseers/bishops” would pray together and come up with thoughts together in the Councils of Jerusalem.

Later, St. Peter died in Rome...and because of this, the bishops of Rome who followed St. Peter came to be seen as carrying on that role of St. Peter to head the Church. Not that the pope “ran” everything, but that he was a symbol of unity for the whole Church.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the bishop of Lyons, wrote before the year 200AD:...*that tradition derived from the Apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul...which comes down to our time by means of a succession of bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority.*

**Patriarch vs. Pope – However,** in the early church, by the 300’s, five bishops, not just ROME, were especially important: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria. Importantly, the text of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) clearly divides jurisdiction over various dioceses/bishops among these five different patriarchs – not just ROME.

Because of this, within the last twenty years, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis have stated in ecumenical discussions with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we could unite with each group still running their own affairs (choosing their own bishops, taking care of their own questions about the liturgy, etc.)

This same thinking has also been applied to discussion on reunion with other Christian groups and the Roman Catholic Church: That the pope would be a spiritual leader, but not have “jurisdictional” control over these other groups and all of their decision-making if there was reunion. There would have to be agreement on moral issues and faith issues (so we would have to all abide by the decisions of combined Church Councils I would imagine?) but not the “running” of each group.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUCHARIST 300AD-1000AD

During this time the Eucharist becomes more elaborate. Slowly the local populations in western Europe develop new languages from the old Latin, but the language of the Western Church stays Latin. In the East, Greek is the language at mass for many, but there are also many local traditions: Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, etc. All these groups develop independently of one another, and they gradually grow distant from each other.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE OTHER SACRAMENTS 30AD – 1000AD

We have gotten used to having “seven” sacraments in the Church, but this number has gone up and down throughout the history of the Church. We have had seven since the Council of Trent in the 1500’s.

- BAPTISM: From the time of Scripture.
- CONFIRMATION: Confirmation is really a part of the baptism sacrament, it is the CONFIRMATION of the baptism. So, since Scripture.
- SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: Since the first century, AD. THERE WAS ALWAYS A SENSE THAT THE CHURCH COULD HELP US IN OUR EFFORTS TO RECONCILE WITH GOD. But the first form was public and involved a public ritual. People didn't like it.
  - The private form developed starting around the year 600AD.
- SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK: From the time of Scripture. See James 5:13: *Are there sick among you? They should call the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord...*
- SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE: There was always a tradition of a Church blessing for marriages. It did not become an official sacrament until about 1000AD.
- SACRAMENTS OF HOLY ORDERS:
  1. Deacons: From the time of Scripture. But dies out around 700AD. The modern diaconate was brought back in the 1960's.
  2. Bishops: From the time of Scripture. Seen to be inheriting the role of the apostles.
  3. Priests (presbyters): From the time of Scripture.

## DEVELOPMENT OF EVANGELISM

Soon after legalization, almost the entirety of the Roman Empire embraces Christianity. In the centuries following, many new areas of evangelization in Europe embrace Christianity through the conversion of kings, etc. – not because of the person-to-person conversions of earlier Christianity. This was not always a good process to change a society to a Christian one. Many times only a cultural Christianity was introduced which had not truly permeated the hearts and minds of the average person.

## MONASTICISM

The monastic movement was a reaction to the new reality of legalized Christianity. Some Christians felt that the faith had now lost its challenge or had become watered down by new members who were not as committed as they were when Christians were persecuted and belonging to the Church meant one had made a real decision. Therefore, some sought what they called “the new martyrdom” through going out into the desert and turning their backs on all comforts, on marriage, wealth, etc. St. Anthony of Egypt was the first. Western monasticism traces its roots to Benedict in Italy in the 500's. Monasteries harbor the most educated priests, and guarded ancient knowledge and learning during the barbarian invasions 400-600AD.

## EAST AND WEST SPLIT -- 1054

In 1054 there is an official split in Christianity between what is now called the Catholic Church versus the Orthodox Churches. This split largely occurs between what were Greek-speaking areas of the old Roman Empire versus Latin-speaking and, really, had to do with two separate

cultures that lost connections because they spoke different languages and didn't interact hardly at all.

## **SOME DIFFICULT TIMES FOR THE CHURCH – EVEN AS GOD INSPIRES REFORMERS AND MYSTICS TO RENEW THE CHURCH --1090 – 1517**

The Church faced a number of challenges at this time, which caused difficulty, even while many reform movements happened at this time: So, in the midst of many inspiring saints and reform movements in the Church (St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis of Assisi, etc.), Europe was entering into a difficult time – as was the Church.

These groups were numerous and significant, even during the height of the corruption in Rome. The significance, strength and number of these movements attest to the desire of many people in this time (or of God's!) to embrace true Gospel values. **The existence of great reform movements alongside serious problems in the Church is a constant theme in the history of the Church.**

- Threat of Islam: Between 632AD and 711AD Islam overruns all of Christian Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Spain, Portugal and Iraq. In succeeding centuries what is now Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Greece, the Balkans and Cyprus are also overrun. Muslim armies are defeated in their invasion of France in the early 700's, but areas ruled by Christians are reduced to a small area in Europe and Asia Minor along with the African kingdoms of Nubia and Ethiopia.
  - The Crusades, originally starting in response to claims that Christian pilgrims were being harassed while visiting, or kept from visiting, Jerusalem, begin. Several crusades are organized in a 300 year period, and it drains Europe of people and funds.
- The Black Death (1360's) is a time when 1/3 of the population of Europe dies, and there is a very negative mindset in Europe – one stressing death and suffering in the religious mindset of the people. One sees religious art, etc. being much sadder and focused on devils, hell and suffering.
- Persecution of the Jewish people in Europe, Witch hunts. Many scholars now are connecting the Black Death and also the ongoing Crusades (and the constant call to wars which often ended disastrously) with the beginning of a more paranoid and violent atmosphere in Europe at this time:

Indeed, it is during this time that the mistreatment of the Jewish people escalates: England is the first to completely ban Jewish people from living in their country (13<sup>th</sup> c.) Many countries follow, causing Jewish people to flee to Poland, which was the most tolerant society in Europe in that era.

This is also when mob rule – in persecuting minorities (like the Jewish people) or scapegoats (like witchhunts) escalates.

## **CLERGY AND BISHOPS OFTEN CONTROLLED BY SECULAR POWERS – (INVESTITURE CONTROVERSY C. 1100AD) LEADING TO THE POPES GETTING MORE POWERFUL....AND THIS LEADS TO CORRUPTION IN**

## THE CHURCH

In the midst of the problems Europe and the Church were facing, the Popes became stronger and more powerful.

The reason that a strong papacy also developed during this time was in response to the challenge to Church authority by strong kings, etc. in the Middle Ages who, on a widespread basis, controlled the choice of bishops and pastors for parishes. This caused much corruption and a spiritual vacuum in the Church. So the Church strengthened the Papacy to help it stand up for the right to pick its' own bishops.

After the strengthening of the Papacy versus the kings, etc. in Europe at the time, the leadership of the Church begins to enjoy great power and status (1100 AD and on.)

And the Church enters into a VERY CORRUPT PERIOD! This certainly contributes to the environment which produced the Reformation with Martin Luther.

## THE REFORMATION WITH MARTIN LUTHER – 1517

Martin Luther was a monk from Germany. And he was, initially, opposed the sale of indulgences (to take time off of purgatory) through the payment of money.

Eventually his program for reform expanded to especially deal with issues such as how one achieves salvation. Interestingly, the world body of Lutheran churches and the Catholic Church issued common statements on salvation (by works and faith) as well as on the Eucharist in 1999.

## COUNTER-REFORMATION – COUNCIL OF TRENT, 16<sup>TH</sup> C.

The Reformation had a very strong effect on the Catholic Church – and caused the most extensive reform in its history. The leadership of the Church at this time drastically changed. Some changes made:

- Seminaries: Before this time priests received no training for their service besides learning to say mass in Latin. After this time they were put through a rigorous program of formation and education through the seminaries.
- New Evangelization: Many now applied themselves to true evangelization of the faithful. Basically, the Church worked harder with the competition. From this era come many of the modern spiritual classics of Christian spirituality. Notable among many are St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis de Sales.

## AGE OF EXPLORATION

All of this coincides with the opening up of a whole new hemisphere to the Christians in Europe, as well as greatly increased travel, especially by sea. The Church begins to promote evangelism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. It is a time of great growth.

## MODERN CHALLENGES

- French Revolution – Anti-religious feeling is such in post-revolutionary France that all churches are closed and, instead, “temples” to the new deistic religion of the revolution are put in their place.
- Deism, Atheism – in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., for the first time, large numbers of people are even



expressing that they do not believe in God. Others believe in a “Creator” distanced from historical experience.

- Marxism – In the Soviet Union and then in many other countries, this ideology and political system are against religion.
- Secularism – Large modern societies sometimes remove all religion from public life.

## RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO MODERN THINKING

- The Church reacted to these new challenges by promoting the idea that religion and science could coexist – we are not fundamentalist, and can work with science on how the world was made, evolution, etc. So: **Catholicism is open modern thought**, and to science, etc. – as in saying that maybe the six days of the Bible are six billion-billion-year-long periods. The person to first promote the Big Bang Theory was a priest, etc.
  - The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) not only rejected rationalism (the belief that reason alone could grasp the mysteries of life), but also Fideism (the belief that an uncritical faith, apart from reason, is sufficient to grasp God’s revelation.)
- Catholics also have learned from psychology to look at our teachings – so that while we once had strict rules about suicide being a “sin” (so that people couldn’t be buried through the Church in cases of suicide) we now don’t say that. Other issues were affected as well.
- Catholics also have learned from modern social thought to look at our teachings and so the Church also begins to apply itself to **the problems of the Industrial Age** with a series of letters beginning in 1896. In these letters issues such as fair wages, safe working environment, child labor, the right to unionize, etc. are addressed.

## INFALLIBILITY

The First Vatican Council also endorsed the idea of papal infallibility. The teaching requires that the teaching be one which the whole Catholic community generally already believes.

To this end, in the 1940’s, the Vatican sent out letters to all the bishops of the world asking if the people of their dioceses believed in the Assumption of Mary. When the replies were positive, this teaching was promulgated “ex cathedra” (or from “the chair”.)

These this is the only time any teaching has been taught infallibly in this way.

## SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL – 1959-1965

- The Church calls on all members to get back to the basics – Scripture and the Mass and other sacraments. We are called to immerse ourselves in Scripture and to participate in mass and the other sacraments well.
- Church accepts religious liberty for all (this came from Americans) – that no religion should have a special status in a society such that other faiths are put down.
- The Church accepts all Christian churches (Protestant, etc.) as sharing in the Church of Christ while still valuing the differences of our own which we value.
- Church calls for a renewal of the thinking that ALL Catholics (not just priests and

nuns, etc.) have a mission to be disciples because of their baptism.

- Church calls for changes in the liturgy – In the Vatican II documents, the Eucharist is emphasized as the “source and summit” of who we are as Catholics. Call for “full, conscious and active participation” in the liturgy. Vernacular language, altar turned around, and (by the 1970's) Catholics receiving the Precious Blood and the host in their hands. Community needs were expressed in prayers of petition, and lay people were allowed to participate in proclaiming the Word of God as lectors and in distributing the Body and Blood of Christ as Eucharistic Ministers. Much of the changes in the liturgy are based on practices of the early Church.

Recent years have seen a debate about liturgy in the Church with some looking for more solemnity and reverence in the liturgy since the changes after Vatican II.

- The Church brings back deacons.
- Greater Subsidiarity – Local bishops’ conferences develop during this time to help bishops deal with local issues at the local level. Priests’ councils, parish councils, etc. all develop out of the philosophy of Vat II.
- The Church calls for a renewal in how Christians are brought into the Church, and goes back to the ancient communal practice which we call the RCIA – rather than just giving someone a book to read and meeting with a priest individually.

## CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Catholic Pentecostals first appear in the U.S. at Dunesque University in 1967. Internationally, charismatic Catholics have become a huge force in “third world” countries. In some countries a very high percentage of the Catholic population is now charismatic. It is estimated that over 1/3 of Latino Catholics in the world today are charismatic.

## CHURCH BECOMES A WORLDWIDE CHURCH

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> c. the biggest story of the Church today might be the growth and vitality it is experiencing in the “third world”. In Africa and many parts of Asia the Church is growing at an incredible rate.

## ECUMENISM:

Since 1965 the Church has worked at building bridges with other churches.

### *QUOTE FROM POPE JOHN XXIII:*

*Unhappily during the centuries the seamless robe of Christ has been torn, and is still rent....It is our duty to soften this discord with our behavior and our speech, with the example of our humility and charity – with these two virtues above all, for they overcome all resistance.*

Pope John XXIII, from A Joyful Soul, ed by Jerome M. Vereb, C.P., 2000, p. 48.

## MODERN TRENDS

- Scandals have rocked the Church around the world. Response has been a call for a new spirit of renewal in the Church – to live more simply, to focus more on service to God’s people, to have humility in the leadership of the Church.

- The NEW EVANGELIZATION has been the main theme of the last few years. It is about REEVANGELIZING the world through a simple message, through showing the Church to be loving and merciful, and through getting back to basics with our faith (helping others, helping the poor, praying, celebrating the mass well, learning the Scriptures, living simply, etc.)