

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
The Holy Catholic Church

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this 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 . . .” (Matthew 16:18–19)

Insight

What groups are an essential part of life for you and why?

Russ was in his third year of pre-med. His studies were correspondingly rigorous and time consuming, but he still tried out each year for choir. Many students from non-musical disciplines tried out each year, as Russ did, not for prestige or the summer travel tour, but because it was so satisfying.

Russ would not trade his experience in choir for anything else. Practices were demanding and time consuming, but the results were heavenly—a foretaste of Heaven on earth. The choir made great music together, their voices blending beautifully.

During choir, Russ felt energized and lifted out of himself. Choir was not a luxury. Russ realized choir was an important part of his life.

For Reflection . . .

We, too, as Russ did, share “heavenly” experiences—experiences that move us above and beyond our routine daily experiences and point to the deeper meaning of life.

When have you experienced a group coming together as one as Russ's choir did? How did that happen?

What, for you, would be “Heaven on earth”?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 751, 771–780, 813–870

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 127–139

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 147, 156, 161, 165–167, 174–176

Church Teaching

Called Beyond Ourselves, Beyond this Life

The word *church* derives from a Greek term meaning “called out” or “gathered,” and implies a coming together. In the Church we come together and are made one in Christ.

The Church comprises both visible and invisible aspects. She is a visible society hierarchically organized. The Church is both vehicle and goal of God’s saving plan. She is an invisible mystery, the sacrament of Salvation, a sign and instrument which draws us up into God’s embrace now and in the life to come.

The Church, the Body of Christ, is the Communion of Saints—the Church on earth, the deceased members of the Church who are being purified, and all the saints in Heaven.

Essential Characteristics of the Church

In the Creed we profess “We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” These are the four essential attributes, or Marks, of the Church.

- ◆ *one*: the Church is one because it has as its source the unity of the Blessed Trinity, three divine Persons in one God. The Church has one faith, one sacramental life, one apostolic succession, one hope, and one call to live in charity.
- ◆ *holy*: the Church is holy because it originates in God who is holy. The Holy Spirit dwells within the Church so that the Church is a source of sanctification for all.
- ◆ *catholic*: the Church is catholic, which means universal. The Church proclaims and administers the fullness of the means of Salvation and is sent out on mission to the whole world by Christ.
- ◆ *apostolic*: the Church is apostolic in its origin as it is built upon the foundation of the Apostles. The Church’s teaching is fundamentally that of the Apostles.