

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time • Year B • July 28, 2024



*Almighty God,
you call us to be your
singular people
characterized by
one body, one Spirit,
one hope, one Lord,
one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father
of all.*

Sunday Word

2 Kings 4:42-44
Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18
Ephesians 4:1-6
John 6:1-15

Fed by the Lord God

The first fruit of the harvest is offered. Elisha commands that it be given to the people to eat. The meager amount, says the prophet, will be more than enough. It is. The psalm celebrates the miracle: the hand of the Lord feeds his people.

Worthy

Saint Paul urges the Christian community to live up to the gift that has been given them in Christ. Believers are to strive for unity in all things.

A Great Sign

Crowds of people follow Jesus, for he is performing amazing signs and wonders among them—signs of healing, signs of power. The broken are made whole. What little food they have among them is multiplied, and all are fed.

Church Teaching: Unity and Ecumenism

Unity

There are rich Eucharistic themes in today's Scriptures. However, the doctrinal focus flows from the Second Reading. Saint Paul appeals for unity among the followers of Jesus. Christian believers are to live up to the high calling they have received, striving to preserve the unity that characterizes the household of the faithful. This characteristic, unity, is grounded in the core truths of Christian faith expressed in this Scripture as a series of univocal realities: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God.

The Church is herself characterized by unity because her very source is one, the Holy Trinity. The Three Divine Persons are One God. The unity of the Church is thus a gift from above. Unity is the very essence of the household of faith, whose members are bound together spiritually as one Body in Christ. The Nicene Creed makes reference to this oneness. Every Sunday the assembly professes belief in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Members must maintain harmony and union among themselves. Every divisive inclination or practice must be minimized. There is no place for factionalism within the Church. Overcoming division—at every level—is a pressing task, because unity is an essential mark of the Church.

Divisions

And yet, from its beginnings, the Church experienced rifts. Saint Paul wrote to censure these divisions (see the First Letter to the Corinthians). Later, much more serious and lasting schisms (or divisions) occurred. Some of these terrible wounds, for example, split believers into different doctrinal camps in the fourth century (between the Nestorians, non-Chalcedonians, and Chalcedonians). The same is true of the great schism of the eleventh century (between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholics) and the Reformation of the sixteenth century (between Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Anglicans).

These separations were caused by sin, although those who are raised in and baptized into separated communities are not responsible for these rifts. Indeed, all who are justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ and rightly called Christians.

The divisions between Christians today create scandal and diminish our witness in the world. The Second Vatican Council called for a healing of these modern wounds to unity.

The Work of Ecumenism

The ecumenical movement began from initiatives among Protestants, Anglicans, and the Orthodox early in the twentieth century, in which Catholics joined later. After the Second Vatican Council, Catholic participation became a firm commitment.

Catholic principles for involvement in the ecumenical movement were enunciated by Pope Paul VI as putting the Catholic household in order first; developing proper attitudes that would lead to conversion; working to understand others; building an organized dialogue to compare doctrine; praying for unity; and collaborating with other Christians to serve the needs of the world. Pope John Paul II also promulgated an encyclical letter devoted solely to the topic of Christian unity, *Ut Unum Sint* (“On Commitment to Ecumenism”). The very title itself comes from the express desire of Jesus (see John 17:21).

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Many doctrinal and practical issues must yet be resolved before the wounds to Church unity are finally healed. Nevertheless, many Catholic dioceses throughout the

United States have established covenants with Protestant ecclesial communities in order to cooperate in prayer and good works. Ultimately, the work of unity transcends our human abilities and efforts. It must rely upon the graced assistance of the Triune God, from whom the Church was first born.

Key Terms

BONDS OF UNITY

The visible bonds of communion in the Church made evident through the profession of one faith, the celebration of liturgy and the sacraments, and apostolic succession (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 815).

ECUMENISM

Name given to those efforts that promote unity among all Christians (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 820).

SCHISM

Term describing the refusal of submission to the pope; it characterizes an individual or group broken away from the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2089).

Voices of Faith

God is one and Christ is one: There is one Church, and one chair founded, by the Lord's authority, upon Peter. It is not possible that another altar can be set up, or that a new priesthood can be appointed, over and above this one altar and this one priesthood. Whoever gathers elsewhere, scatters.
—Saint Cyprian

Relations between Christians are not aimed merely at mutual knowledge, common prayer and dialogue. They presuppose and from now on call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message.
—Pope Saint John Paul II

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 812 (faith recognizes the Marks of the Church), 814 (diversity within unity), 816 (the sole Church of Christ is the Catholic Church), 819 (elements of grace outside the Church), 820 (toward unity)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Chapter 11 (The Four Marks of the Church), especially the section entitled “The Church Is One,” pages 127–129

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 161 (the Church is one), 162 (Church of Christ), 163 (non-Catholic Christians), 164 (working toward unity)

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