

OCIA – Why the Church?

- Why a Church? We are made for relationship because God *IS* a relationship, essentially.
 - Holy Trinity: a relationship of relationships.
 - God + Adam & Eve: a relationship of God & man.
 - When Original Sin entered into the world, it disrupted our relationships...
 - God intervened and drew the people of Israel (the chosen people) into relationship once more.
 - Jesus came to solidify and make present a relationship with all people *in His very Body!*
 - This is what it means that the Church is the “Body of Christ...”
 - This Body has a visible expression of that here on this earth: the Catholic Church.

- The Church is both physical and spiritual...
 - Physical: we see a visible expression of the Church on this earth (the Catholic Church).
 - Spiritual: the Church exists in Heaven, where Christ reigns in glory.
 - *In this, we see that the Church is the “Sacrament of Salvation” – we see a visible expression (and how we have) of the inward union that God has with us.

-When Christ came, He gathered 12 men to Himself, with Peter as the Head. These men would be the fulfillment of the 12 Tribes of Israel (the structure of the Old Covenant). He shared with these Apostles His authority, mission, and power.

- Then, when blood & water poured forth from Jesus’ side, the Church was born.
- The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to continually sanctify and protect the Church.

-The Three “States” of the Church:

- 1) Church Triumphant: Members of the Church who now reign with God in Heaven.
 - They are still members of the Church and thus we are united to them still...That’s why we can ask them to pray for us.
- 2) Church Suffering: those in need of further purification before entering Heaven.
 - Since they are still members of the Church, we can pray for them.
- 3) Church Militant: those on earth fighting the good fight.

-The Church is a Body...

-“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12-13).

-We are all different “parts” of the body, but united in Christ.

-Christ is “the head of the Body, the Church” (Col. 1:18).

“About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter.” – St. Joan of Arc

-The Church is a Bride...

-Christ is the bridegroom (husband) who loves the Church as His Bride.

-“Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25).

-Christ rescues His bride (Baptism), feeds her (the Eucharist), cleanses her (Confession), makes her alive (Confirmation), gives her authority (Priesthood), heals her (Anointing of the Sick), and teaches her how to love (Marriage).

-Because of this, we refer to the Church as “She” and not “It.”

-Four Marks of the Church: essential characteristics of the Church...

1) **One**: the Church is united as one, though composed of many, since she is the one Body of Christ.

-Visible expressions of this unity:

a) Catholics believe the same faith and doctrines (handed on by the Apostles)

b) Worship of God is essentially the same everywhere throughout the world in Catholic churches.

c) All priests and bishops follow a “line of succession” dating back to the Apostles.

-The Church’s unity has been wounded by schisms and breaks...Jesus desires us to work towards restoring that unity!

2) **Holy**: being united with Christ, the Church is sanctified by Him, and through Him sanctifies all.

-Though she is full of sinners, the Church is holy because she is Christ’s.

-The members of the Church are sinful and imperfect, but the Church herself is not.

3) **Catholic**: the Church is “universal,” complete, and meant for all.

-The Church has the “fulness of the faith” and all that is necessary for the world to be saved.

-The Church is meant for all people at all times, regardless of situations (race, economics, history).

4) **Apostolic**: The Church is founded and built upon the Apostles.

-This is crucial because Jesus gave His very authority to the Apostles, and they passed it along.

-*Apostolic Succession*: the mission & authority of Jesus, as handed on to the Apostles, has been handed on through the centuries in the Catholic Church.

-The mission of Jesus endures: “Go and baptize all nations...”

-The authority of Jesus endures: “Jesus breathed on them & said: receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

-The promise of Jesus endures: “I will be with you always...”

-What about the Pope?

-Pope: the bishop of Rome and successor of Peter.

-Christ clearly established Peter as head of the Apostles...

-“You are Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18).

-Peter has a unique role after the Ascension of Jesus – he gives the first homily, presides over the first major council in Jerusalem, and speaks for the Church.

-The authority and role of Peter as leader of the Church passes along to his successors (the bishops of Rome).

-Throughout the history of the Church, the pope has always been the visible symbol of unity for the Church...If you are “united” with the pope, you are united with the Church!
-Pope Francis is the 266th pope in the history of the Catholic Church.

-How does the Church work, practically?

-“Church” can refer to 3 things:

- 1) Parish: those gathered here to worship and be in relationship with God together.
- 2) Diocese: those on a broader, but still local level.
-3 Dioceses in Nebraska: Lincoln, Omaha, Grand Island
- 3) Universal Church: the community of believers throughout the world.

-Jesus is the head of the Church. His “Prime Minister” is the Pope, who helps direct the Universal Church here on earth.

-The Pope and his close collaborators (Cardinals) help to teach and govern the Church on a large scale & help solve conflicts.

-Every diocese has a bishop who is a successor of the apostles. The Bishop is the spiritual father of the diocese and teaches & governs them.

-Every diocese is composed of parishes. Each parish has a pastor who is the spiritual father of the parish, responsible for their spiritual needs.

-Lay people (non-ordained) collaborated in each of these areas. They are responsible for going into the world and sanctifying it!

-The Church is a **family**...Anywhere that you go in the world, you will find a Catholic Church that you are welcomed into.

-The Church is a **home**...We were made for relationship and made for a home. We will not be truly and fully home until Heaven, but the Church was given to us as an “already, but not yet” home to prepare us for our true home!