



The One True Church (Part V) by Joe Sixpack

Last week, we made it half way through the four marks of the Catholic Church—the marks given to demonstrate her Founder is Jesus Christ, God Himself. Today we will finish with the marks we call catholic and apostolic.

“Catholic” is a word meaning “universal”. That is, the Church is for all men of all times in all places. Because our Church alone is universal in time, doctrine and extent, she has existed in perfect continuity from the time of Christ and will last until His Second Coming. She teaches all His gospel, and administers all His divine means of salvation. She is not confined to any particular region or nation, but is widespread among all the nations of the world. The word Catholic doesn’t denote a quality. One can’t be Anglo, Eastern or Liberal Catholic; one cannot be more or less Catholic. One is either Catholic or one is not.

Eastern Orthodoxy isn’t Catholic in time, as they have existed only since the 11th century with the Great Schism. The Protestant churches can’t be Catholic in time because they date from the 16th (Lutherans & Anglicans), the 17th (Baptists), the 18th (Methodists) or the 19th centuries (Disciples of Christ; aka Church of Christ). The outside churches aren’t Catholic in faith, because they have broken away from the center of unity, the Holy See, and deny many of Christ’s laws and doctrines. They’re not Catholic in extent, as from the beginning of their secession they have identified themselves with some particular nation—Germany, Scandinavian countries, England, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Greece, etc.

Mere profession of a Creed doesn’t constitute one a Catholic (many others do indeed use the Apostles’ Creed), because the different separatist churches read their own particular opinions into it. A number of different sects scattered around the world doesn’t constitute a Catholic church; Catholicism implies a divine unity of government, faith and worship.

The early Church Fathers often declare that the Church is Catholic in their extant writings from the first four centuries. They consistently tell us the Church is Catholic because she was spread over the entire known world and teaches everywhere “universally and completely all the doctrines which ought to come to men’s knowledge”.¹ Verify this for yourself by reading what was written by Irenaeus, Origen, Optatus, and Augustine online or at a good library.

The Catholic Church is Catholic in time, because while we can accurately fix the date of every heresy and schism, no one can assign any date to her origin except the day of Pentecost. The Catholic Church is Catholic in extent, outnumbering any one sect; in fact, she is greater than all of them put together. Mere numbers, of course, would not constitute catholicity, but the

¹ St. Cyril, *Catechesis*, 18:23

Church's *de facto* numerical superiority points to her *de jure* catholicity—her universal divine commission to spread the one faith among all nations.

The Catholic Church's catholicity is demonstrated in that she alone teaches all that Christ taught, and she alone administers the means of salvation (sacraments) established by Jesus. She's not confined to any region or nation, but is active in every nation on earth. Indeed, until 1517, there was no other Christian religion beside the Catholic Church. All others are merely cheap imitations of the real thing.

For a church to be apostolic, it must be able to trace its roots in unbroken succession back to the original apostles. In fact, before giving His divine commission to the apostles, Christ insists on *His* divine commission from His Father: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21).

The only church that can rightly claim that its origin isn't due to a break with the past is the Catholic Church. The European Protestants broke with apostolic succession at the time of Luther's revolt (1517-1520), and the English Protestants (1559) when King Henry VIII made Parker the first Protestant bishop of Canterbury. Since that time we have seen what amounts to religious entropy.

When early Catholics wished to use a most convincing argument to prove the true Church, they always appealed to her apostolic origin. We find them compiling lists of legitimate bishops, especially with regard to the Apostolic See of Rome. As early as the 2nd century we find the Syrian Hegesippus and the Greek Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, maintaining that the source and standard of the faith is the apostolic Tradition, handed down in an unbroken succession of bishops. "But since it would be very long in such a volume as this to count up the successions [i.e., series of bishops] in all the churches [called dioceses in modern terms], we confound those who in any way, whether through self-pleasing or vainglory, or through blindness or evil opinion, gather together otherwise than they ought, by pointing out the tradition arrived from the Apostles of the greatest, most ancient, and universally known Church, founded and established by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, and also the faith declared to men which through the succession of bishops comes down to our times".²

It is true that other churches make a claim to apostolicity, but their claims are always erroneous and sometimes even ridiculous. For example, several members of the Church of Christ, when defending their apostolic origins, have stated to me that their name proves their origin. What? That might work for someone who is incapable of logic and right reason, but most of us find that sort of argument ludicrous.

A book could be written on this topic alone; indeed, many books *have* been written on the topic of apostolicity. I urge you to study this topic, because you will discover that only the Catholic Church can trace her roots back to the apostles and Jesus Christ Himself.

As long as this column exists, you'll have the opportunity to learn things about the Catholic Church you probably never knew. You'll read about the sacraments and 10 Commandments, reaching far beyond anything you've ever read before. You'll learn stories from the lives of the saints and other people in the Catholic Church's glorious and sometimes ugly history.

Why undertake this weekly communication between us? Well, just look at the world around you and I think you'll be able to answer that for yourselves. We truly need to know What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

Got questions? Go to JoeSixpackAnswers.com.

² St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3:3