



EPIC

A JOURNEY THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY

THE EARLY CHURCH

STEVE WEIDENKOPF

Study Set

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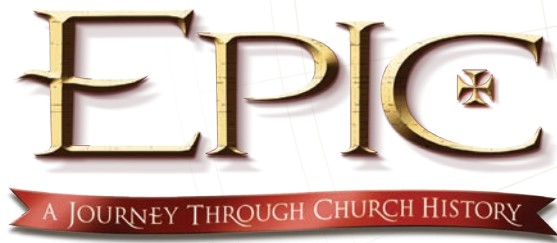
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THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

Welcome to *Epic: The Early Church*, a period study that is part of the *Epic* Church History program. The *Epic* Foundational Study (*Epic: A Journey Through Church History*) offers a twenty-part overview of the first two thousand years of Church history, breaking it into twelve unique, color-coded time periods.

Epic: The Early Church covers the first five hundred years of the Church's story, from the beginnings of Church history at Pentecost, through the persecutions and councils of the first five centuries. This study encompasses the first three of the twelve *Epic* Church history periods:

- Mustard Seed: AD 33–99
- Persecution: AD 100–312
- Conversion & Councils: AD 313–499

The fact that you have decided to embark upon this adventure suggests that, on some level, you believe that understanding Church history is an important part of your faith journey as a Catholic. And yet you might find it difficult to articulate those reasons to others.

Why Should Catholics Study Church History?

At a very basic level, Church history is a kind of family history. Hearing and sharing these stories is a vital part of our identity as Catholics. Just as we enjoy telling and retelling stories from our own personal family history ("Remember the time Aunt Mary forgot to put the sugar in the pumpkin pie?"), the sharing of these stories from Church history creates a central deposit of shared family memories. These memories are important building blocks in the foundation of your identity—and your faith journey.

In a real sense, as you encounter the people, places, and events of these centuries, you are likely to discover, perhaps for the first time, fascinating aspects of the Catholic faith that will strengthen you in your own journey as a Catholic. Each of these stories—some funny, some sad, some inspiring—helps us to understand, appreciate, and *remember* who we are as a family of faith.

We are the inheritors of the legacies of great men and women who for two thousand years have spread the gospel throughout the world and built a great and lasting civilization.

A Catholic “Identity Crisis”

Unfortunately, many Catholics today do not understand the significance of the Church or the role it has played in shaping, building, and maintaining Western civilization. As a result, some Catholics experience a kind of spiritual “identity crisis” as they encounter attacks against Church history and doctrines, simply because they feel unable to refute the erroneous contention that the early Church was not the Catholic Church—that “early Christians” were not in fact “early Catholics.”

The good news is that a careful reading of the historical record tells another story. As we shall see, the writings of the Church fathers and the actions of the first bishops—in particular, the first bishops of Rome—clearly show that the faith of the early Christians was indeed authentically, organically, and intrinsically *Catholic*.

As Catholics, we sometimes hear that “things were different in the early Church.” This sentiment is intended to discredit the Church and attack its authority, but the argument has a fundamental flaw: it is historically inaccurate. The early Church was the Catholic Church; the early Christians were Catholic. As the earliest documents reveal, the early Church believed in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and its liturgies and sacraments bore strong similarities to our own. As the Church moved from the apostolic period, one already begins to see signs of the development of a hierarchical structure that is strikingly similar to our own.

Studying the Early Church

This study continues the “epic journey” begun in the foundational *Epic* study. Here, we will explore the first five hundred years of Church history more slowly and carefully in order to “unpack” the great riches of the Faith and apply them on a more personal level. As we unlock the stories of our most ancient ancestors in the Faith, we will discover the lives of heroic martyrs; brilliant philosophers and theologians; cunning emperors; brave soldiers; and saintly monks, hermits, and popes. As we contemplate the lives of these individuals and the times in which they lived, we will gain new insights into how these brave men and women of the early Church responded to God’s call to holiness, laying the foundation for what was to become the single most influential institution the world has ever known.

Christ: The Key to Understanding

As Catholics, we believe that history is the story of God’s plan for our salvation. History is not a series of random people, places, and events that could have rolled out in an infinite number of ways. In fact, just the opposite is true: We have already been told the end of the story! Jesus Christ will return and institute a new heaven and a new earth. Because of Christ, the history of the Catholic Church is unlike the history of a nation or a civilization. It has a beginning (Creation) and an end (the return of Jesus). Indeed, all of human history hinges on one central event: the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Every other moment in history, projected backward to Creation and forward to the Second Coming, finds its deepest significance in light of its relationship to this one event. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* succinctly indicates: “The Church . . . believes that the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of man’s history is to be found in its Lord and Master” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 450, citing *Gaudium et spes* 10 § 3, cf. 45 § 2).

The significance of the Church in history cannot be fully appreciated apart from Christ, for it was he who created the Church while he was here on earth. In the Gospel of Matthew, we see clearly the Lord’s intention to build a lasting, visible sign of his love, grace, and truth in the world: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom

of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18–19).

The Catholic Church is a mystery that is visible and invisible, physical and spiritual. As we read in the *Catechism*: “The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only ‘with the eyes of faith’ (*Roman Catechism* I, 10, 20) that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life” (CCC 770).

On Earth as It Is in Heaven: The Four Marks of the Church

The Church began as small as a “mustard seed,” but over the centuries grew throughout the world, bringing the life of Christ to every people and nation, just as our Lord commanded (see Matthew 28:18–20). The early Church and the Church today are essentially the same. This is clearly illustrated in the four “marks” (or characteristics) of the Church that can be traced to the earliest teachings of Christ and the apostles. In this study, we will consider how these marks were evident in the early Church—and how they continue to reveal themselves in the Church today.

These four marks (or signs, as we will also refer to them), according to the *Catechism*, are “... inseparably linked with each other (cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* [1965]) ... [and] indicate essential features of the Church and its mission. The Church does not possess them of itself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*, and it is he who calls the Church to realize each of these qualities” (CCC 811; emphasis added). While the divine source of these qualities is recognized only with the eyes of faith, “... their historical manifestations are signs that also speak clearly to human reason” (CCC 812).

The Church is one. Primarily, the Church is one through her source: the unity of the Trinity. The Church is one because the Lord, who founded her, is one. Moreover, the Church is one because of the Holy Spirit who has guided, guarded, and animated the Church throughout her history. Indeed, one could say that unity (or “oneness”) is the essence of the Church (see CCC 813). Historically, the Church’s oneness has been expressed in the continued unity of her governance in the face of schism and in the development of dogma in response to heresy.

The Church is holy. The Church, as the mystical body of Christ, is holy because Christ is holy. Through his passion, death, and resurrection, he has sanctified her and her members. Historically, the holiness of the Church has been expressed through the ongoing witness of the lives of her saints. As members of the Church, we are called to be holy and pattern our lives after those whom holy Mother Church has raised to the altar for our imitation.

The Church is catholic. The Church is universal (*katholikos* in Greek). Mandated by her founder to spread the gospel throughout the world, the Church is catholic through her missionary efforts. Although the first recorded use of the word *catholic* was in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch in the second century, the Church has been catholic since the beginnings of her historical existence.

The Church is apostolic. Founded on the apostles, the Church is apostolic. The apostles handed on the authority they received from Christ to other men in the lived history of the Church, forming an unbroken line of succession to the present day. The bishops, who govern, teach, and sanctify the Church, exercise apostolic authority through

the continuity of their teaching and in their fidelity to divine revelation originally entrusted to the apostles. The Church also shows the sign of being apostolic through her consistent and ongoing missionary activities.

In this study, you will have opportunities to reflect upon these four marks or characteristics of the Catholic Church and to deepen your understanding of how these marks of authenticity manifest themselves even today.

Course Overview

Epic: The Early Church is designed to guide you on a ten-session adventure in learning the early story of the Catholic Church. Over the next several weeks, you will:

- Learn about the major people, places, and events of the first five hundred years of Church history, touching upon the first three time periods in our unique, color-coded learning system.
- Identify the Church fathers and learn their fascinating stories.
- Discover the “back story” of the persecutions that occurred against the Church under the Roman Empire.
- Learn the true story of the first four ecumenical councils.
- Come to recognize the early Christian Church as the Catholic Church.

Materials

Before your group begins, each participant will need:

- *The Early Church Study Set* (which includes *The Early Church Workbook*, *Timeline Chart*, and *Epic Bookmark*).
- Writing materials to take notes.

Course Outline

Session	Title
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- | | |
|-----|----------------------------|
| 1. | The Mustard Seed |
| 2. | The Ways of Life and Death |
| 3. | Martyrs and Apologists |
| 4. | The Faith Attacked |
| 5. | The Dawn of Christendom |
| 6. | The Arian Attack |
| 7. | The Bitter Fruit of Heresy |
| 8. | Heroes of God |
| 9. | Councils and a Great Pope |
| 10. | Splintering of an Empire |

Order of Study

After the first week, you will arrive at each session having read the chapter overview and taken the “Quick Quiz!” to be sure you have understood the key concepts from that period. At the study, you will hear the story of the early Church as told by Church history professor Steve Weidenkopf and speak about what you have learned in group discussions following each presentation. At the end of each lesson, you will have the opportunity to “Continue the Story” by making a commitment to apply what you have learned to your own life.



Each session is divided into the following parts.

A. Overview

This section prepares you to learn the story of the early Church by providing background information on the important persons and events during the specific time period.

B. Quick Quiz!

These questions are designed to help you remember and focus on the most essential points of that period. Answers are provided at the end of each chapter.

C. Follow the Signs

Throughout the study, we will examine the four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) as they apply to the people and events of each session. This will help you to have a better understanding for and appreciation of certain themes and cycles that have been present in the body of Christ from the earliest days.

D. Learn the Story

The next step is to watch the DVD (or listen to the audio CD) presentation and learn the story of the early Church by time period. A brief outline of each session’s talk notes is provided. You can use this outline to follow the DVD or CD presentation and write down notes from the talks.

As you watch the DVD, your focus should be to remember the main events and people of each time period and to see and understand the ongoing themes that occur throughout Church history; by doing so, you will come to know the story of the early Church and also better understand the Church today.

E. Discuss the Story

The discussion questions in this section are designed to help you learn and remember the story of the Catholic Church during her first five hundred years. If other questions come up in the course of your discussion, write them down and have someone in the group research them and discuss them next time. (For help answering questions, visit Questions@OurCatholicHistory.com.)

F. Continue the Story

Church history is important because it helps us grow closer to Christ, make sense of our present world, build our Catholic identity, and defend the Church in the modern age. By studying Church history, we learn the story of our early Catholic forebears, those brave men and women who answered God's call to spread the gospel. What role is God calling *you* to play in the ongoing story of salvation? Each session provides suggestions for ways you can challenge yourself to more fully live out the Faith in the coming week.

Program Features

- **Spotlight:** Learn about an area of special interest in the early Church era.
- **Defending the Faith:** Learn how to defend and witness to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- **Into Focus:** Take a closer look at various issues and subjects of importance to our Faith.
- **Fathers of the Church:** Meet some of the great, saintly figures who were responsible for defining and defending the Faith during the foundational years of the Church.
- **Did You Know?** Don't miss these interesting tidbits to add color and texture to your learning.
- **Saint, Scripture, and Catechism Quotes:** Be inspired and enlightened by these words of wisdom.

May God be with you on this journey, and may the witness of the early Christians, especially the martyrs, enrich and embolden your faith life in order to help you be an instrument in the service of our Lord.

SESSION ONE

The Mustard Seed



“With what can we compare the Kingdom of God . . . ? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

– Mark 4:30–32

A. Overview

Every story has a beginning. Our Catholic family story begins in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection and ten days after the Ascension, the little band of apostles and the Blessed Mother were assembled for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. With holy fire, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, filling them with zeal for the gospel in order to set the world ablaze. St. Peter began the great missionary journey of the Church with a powerful proclamation of Christ crucified and risen. This witness was followed by the conversion of three thousand people—the Church’s very first converts (see Acts 2:14–42).

From that day forward, spreading the gospel became the central activity of the Catholic Church. From that one city of Jerusalem, a seed was planted that built a civilization and produced a bountiful crop of grace, filling the world with the saving message of Jesus Christ over the next two thousand years.



The Lapidation of Saint Stephen, by Rembrandt

The Church was planted in the Roman world. The world of the empire was at first indifferent to the Twelve and their message of love and hope. This began to change as the apostles braved all manner of hardship and suffering to spread the gospel throughout the empire and beyond. As the Church added members, it began to attract the attention of powerful enemies who persecuted and killed its heralds.

Early Martyrs

[St. Stephen] shows that the mystery of the Cross stands at the center of the history of salvation as recounted in the Old Testament; it shows that Jesus, Crucified and Risen, is truly the goal of all this history.

– Pope Benedict XVI,
Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church, 136

The deacon Stephen was the first to shed his blood for Christ. Soon after, Herod Agrippa unleashed his fury on the small band of the faithful in Jerusalem; St. James the Greater, brother of the beloved apostle St. John, was beheaded, thereby giving the ultimate witness of his love for the Savior.

The blood spilled by the early Church was not in vain, as Saul of Tarsus—a well-educated Roman citizen and pharisaical Jew who originally persecuted the Church—was miraculously converted. He was to become a tireless preacher of the Faith.

“AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.”

– Acts 2:4–6

The Conversion and Ministry of St. Paul

This “apostle to the gentiles,” who witnessed the martyrdom of St. Stephen, recounts his conversion in his first epistle to the church at Corinth: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, [Jesus] appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:8–9).

Saul (later known as Paul) became a great preacher of the Faith, traveling extensively to bring the Good News to the gentiles. His travels proved fruitful as gentiles accepted the gospel and entered the Church. However, Paul’s ministry efforts also led to the first great discussion over Church discipline. It was a question that carried eternal consequences and would alter the course of Church history and Western civilization: If a gentile wanted to become a Christian, must he first become a Jew?

The Council of Jerusalem

The issue at hand was whether gentile converts to the Faith needed to be circumcised and follow Jewish dietary laws. Some believed the gentiles needed to become Jewish in order to be Christian, while others—including St. Paul—considered this an unnecessary burden.

The apostles convened in Jerusalem to decide the question once and for all. Once assembled, the discussion ensued, and St. Peter recounted a vision given to him by God on the subject (see Acts 10). St. James the Less, bishop of Jerusalem, then offered the judgment that gentile converts did not have to be circumcised and only had to refrain from eating meat offered to false gods and the flesh of strangled animals and from unchaste acts (see Acts 15).



The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer, by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1883)



The Remorse of the Emperor Nero After the Murder of his Mother, by John William Waterhouse

Persecution Under Nero

As the missionary efforts of the early Church bore fruit, the Church came into greater contact with the secular government of the day—the Roman Empire. Their already tenuous relationship turned violent as the cruel and psychotic emperor Nero unleashed the ferocity of the world’s first superpower on the seemingly insignificant and weak Catholic community in the capital city of Rome.

In the summer of AD 64, Nero’s plan to rebuild a section of the city of Rome in his own image backfired (literally). The fire quickly got out of control, and the city suffered significant destruction and death. After the public outcry—and to deflect criticism—Nero blamed the Christians in the city, who became a convenient scapegoat for the fire. Nero outlawed the Catholic faith (a law that would not be completely repealed until AD 313) and ordered the arrest and death of the faithful in Rome. Two pillars of the Church, Saints Peter and Paul, were also martyred at this time.

Did You Know?

Adoption in Roman society was a common practice among the noble classes when there was no heir to inherit the family fortune or perpetuate the family line. Nero, for example, was adopted in adulthood by his great-uncle Claudius, whom Nero succeeded in AD 54 after the elder man’s death.

Details of the ensuing persecution are recorded in the *Annals* of the Roman senator and historian Gaius Tacitus.

First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted ... they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.

– *Annals* XV, 44

Thankfully, this persecution was restricted to Rome and did not touch Christian communities outside the city. This was the first of many government-sanctioned persecutions that would span the next three centuries. The witness of the martyrs and the cruelty of Nero engendered pity on the part of the Roman populace toward the Church, opening the door to their hearts and disposing them toward the light of Christ.

The Siege of Jerusalem

Prior to his passion and death, Jesus wept over the holy city of Jerusalem and prophesied its destruction.

Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.

– Luke 19:41–42

This prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of the emperor Vespasian, who marched to Palestine with tens of thousands of legionaries to quell a revolt by the Jews. The Jewish revolt that began in AD 66 left much death and destruction in its wake, culminating in the catastrophic destruction of the Holy City and the Temple in AD 70.

The Torches of Nero, by Henryk Siemiradzki



“THE HOLY SPIRIT *is the protagonist, ‘the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission’ (John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 21). It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths. ‘This mission continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ ... so the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked ...’ (Ad gentes 5).” (CCC 852)*

The final siege was preceded by a terrible famine, the effects of which were recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus.

It was ... a sight that would justly bring tears to our eyes ... children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and, what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants; and when those that were most dear were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives.

– Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 5, 10.3

Miraculously, the church built on the site of the Upper Room survived the siege. In fact, the early Catholic community in Jerusalem emerged relatively unscathed in the attack, having fled the city before the arrival of the Roman army.

The Jewish community was not so fortunate. The Temple was utterly destroyed, and its great menorah carried back to Rome and paraded through the city streets as a war trophy by Titus, son of the Roman emperor Vespasian.

By all accounts, the destruction of Jerusalem was a tragedy for the Jewish people. It also marked a turning point in the relationship between the Church and Judaism. From that time, the Catholic faith was no longer considered a Jewish sect but a completely separate entity.

The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem, by David Roberts (1850)





Christian Martyrs in Colosseum, by Jean-Léon Gérôme

B. Quick Quiz!

1. According to the quote in the text, what (or who) is the goal of history?
2. Why did St. Paul consider himself “the least of all the apostles”?
3. What was the first great question that altered the course of Church history and Western civilization?
4. What momentous events transpired in the years AD 66 and 70?

SPOTLIGHT

The Journey of the Apostles

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles were emboldened to preach the Gospel throughout and beyond the confines of the Roman Empire; most met with opposition and violent ends. Although a good deal is known about the actions of St. James the Greater, St. James the Lesser, St. John, and St. Peter, the historical record is not as detailed concerning the other eight apostles. However, the areas of their preaching and missionary activity are known for the most part. The great Catholic historian Warren Carroll provides the following list in his work *The Founding of Christendom* (p. 406).

- **St. Andrew** – Ukraine and Greece
- **St. Bartholomew** – south Arabia (and perhaps India)
- **St. Jude** – Mesopotamia (and perhaps Armenia and Iran)
- **St. Matthew** – Media or Ethiopia
- **St. Matthias** – unknown
- **St. Philip** – Asia Minor
- **St. Simon the Zealot** – Iran
- **St. Thomas** – Parthia and India

Of the regions listed above, only Ukraine and Ethiopia remained predominantly Christian over the centuries. Ethiopia, surrounded in east Africa by overwhelmingly Muslim nations, is still a majority Christian country.

How did such a small group of unskilled men, who struggled to understand Jesus and his ministry, find the courage and wisdom to preach and teach throughout the Roman Empire? Such a thing can only be explained by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Advocate sent by Christ to these men enkindled in them the fire of divine love so they could face the hardships of missionary activity and gave them the fortitude to give their lives in service of the gospel.



Extent of the Preaching and Missionary Activities of the Apostles



Pentecostes, by Vasco Fernandes

C. Follow the Signs

Pentecost and the Seal of the Holy Spirit

On the day of Pentecost, the apostles were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). As Catholics, we complete the journey of Christian initiation by receiving the sacrament of confirmation, during which the bishop anoints us with perfumed oil (*chrism*) and we receive the “mark” or the “seal” of the Holy Spirit: “This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection ...” (CCC 1296).

Like the apostles, by nature of our baptism and confirmation we are called to be witnesses of faith in Jesus Christ and his Church. We are called to live holy lives and encourage others to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus and the Church. One way to grow in holiness is to study—and then strive to model—the saints that the Church holds up as heroic examples of virtue. This study of the early Church will introduce many of the greatest saints in Church history. As you proceed, make a list of those saints that most inspire you, so that you can go back and learn more about their lives. “Those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness ... they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us ...” (CCC 956, citing *Lumen gentium* 49, cf. 1 Timothy 2:5)

D. Learn the Story

Session One: *The Mustard Seed*

Talk Notes

Epic Period: The Mustard Seed

Session One Period: AD 33–70

I. Introduction

- A. A new vision for Church history
- B. What is history?
- C. The importance of learning early Church history
 - 1. “Identity crisis”
 - 2. Conversion
 - 3. Apologetics
- D. The four marks of the Church

II. The Beginning of Our Story

- A. Pentecost
- B. Two early martyrs: St. Stephen and St. James the Greater
- C. Dispersion of the apostles

III. St. Paul's Journeys

- A. His life and conversion
- B. Effects of his missionary work

IV. Early Converts and a Big Question

- A. A gentile convert: Cornelius the Centurion
- B. The Council of Jerusalem

V. Catholics and the Roman Empire

- A. What was the Roman Empire?
- B. The burning of Rome
- C. Nero persecutes the Church

VI. The Holy City Destroyed

- A. Jewish revolt
- B. Arrival of the Legions
- C. Josephus
- D. Siege of Jerusalem

E. Discuss the Story

Answering these questions will help you learn the story of the early Church. If other questions come to mind, write them down to discuss in the group.

1. We believe that Christ is the “hinge of history” and that history has a beginning and an end. In what ways does this contrast with how history is generally understood and taught today? What are some of the considerations we should think about when studying Church history versus the history of a nation or a secular organization? (See CCC 759–760, 770–771.)
2. In what ways was the “holiness” of the Church evident at Pentecost? How were the other three signs also present? (See Acts 2:1–47.)

The Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, by Francesco Hayez



3. As a confirmed Catholic, you are graced with the seal of the Holy Spirit and are called—like the apostles at Pentecost—to be a witness for Christ to the world. What are some important similarities and differences between the world the apostles were called to witness to and our world today?
4. The persecution of the Christians in Rome under Nero and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem were significant events in the life of the early Church. Why? How did such times of adversity affect the Church's growth into a truly catholic ("universal") church? (See CCC 852, 854.)
5. How would you answer the charge that the early Church was different from the Catholic Church? If you have discussed this subject with someone in the past, share your experience. Why do you think people propose and accept this false charge?
6. How does the mustard seed imagery provide a useful context for explaining the development of the Catholic Church over the centuries, particularly with respect to the four marks of her identity: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic? (See Mark 4:30–32; CCC 811–812.)

A Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, your Sacred Heart beats with love for your bride, the Church. By your life, death, and resurrection, you transformed our story and that of the whole human race. Just as the apostles poured out their lives in self-sacrifice and gratitude, so we want to be effective witnesses of the gospel and proud members of the Catholic Church, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in every time and place. Help us to serve you faithfully and without fear. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.





Aqueduct

F. Continue the Story

From the earliest days, the Church has been “apostolic” by actively sending missionaries out to new areas and territories. While you may never travel to a foreign land as a missionary, you probably don’t have to look far for the opportunity to witness to the Faith. Many parishes and Catholic organizations offer opportunities to get involved with a lay apostolate that is dedicated to some aspect of evangelization. (For example, volunteering to teach or help with religious education, Bible studies, and other faith-formation groups, or pro-life work.)

Challenge

1. Make a list of lay apostolates at your parish or in your area.
2. Pick one to keep in prayer this week, asking God to bless their work. Make this prayer something tangible and concrete, such as saying three Hail Marys each day or offering up a Mass or Holy Hour.
3. Consider making a donation to this or another apostolate. The amount is not nearly as important as the act of sacrifice and faith. (see 2 Corinthians 8:1–7.)
4. Consider volunteering with a lay apostolate. Some need weekly or monthly commitments, but others may be able to use help on a more infrequent basis.

Quick Quiz! Answer Key

1. *Jesus Christ.*
2. *Because he persecuted the Church prior to his conversion.*
3. *Must a gentile who wanted to be a Christian first become a Jew?*
4. *In AD 66, Vespasian quelled the Jewish revolt; in AD 70, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.*