



LESSON TWELVE

The Church: God's Family

Opening Prayer

*“For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many,
are one body, so it is with Christ.
For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*

—1 Corinthians 12:12–13

*Lord, unite us in your Spirit.
Amen.*



Lesson Objectives:

- ❖ Understand that the Catholic Church is the one Church founded by Christ on Peter and the apostles, whose authority continues today through apostolic succession.
- ❖ Identify the four marks of the Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—and appreciate how they help us recognize the Church of Christ today.
- ❖ Recognize the Church as an institution that is both divine and human, founded by Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, and composed of many members who are united by that same Spirit.
- ❖ Discover what it means for the Church to be the Mystical Body of Christ, with Christ as the Head and the faithful making up the Body, each baptized person having a unique role in building up the Body in love.

BURNING QUESTIONS

- ❖ There are thousands of churches in the world. Is the Catholic Church the only true Church? How can I know?

With so many voices and beliefs, how can we know where the fullness of Christ's truth is found?

- ❖ Why do we need to belong to a church at all? Isn't Christianity mainly about having a relationship with Jesus?

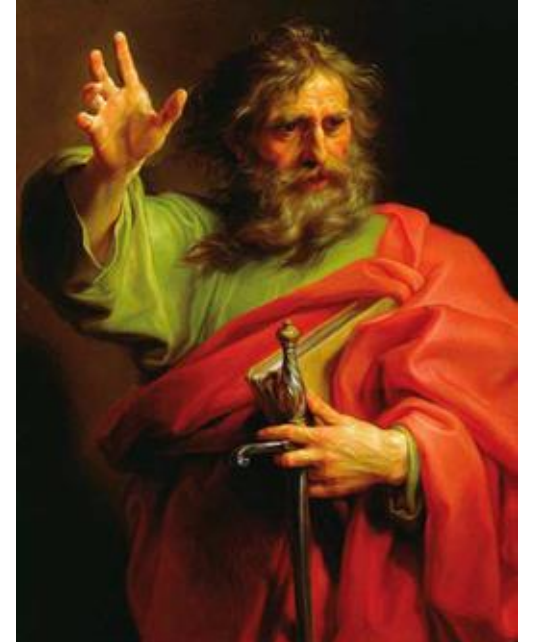
For many years, Christians necessarily lived their faith in church communities. Do you think this might still be necessary? Why?

St. Paul the Apostle

Feast Day: June 29 (with St. Peter) / January 25 (Conversion)

Lived: c. 5–c. 64 · Tarsus, Cilicia · Patron of Missionaries, Evangelists, Writers, Public workers

Saul of Tarsus was a passionate Pharisee who persecuted Christians and witnessed the stoning of St. Stephen. On the road to Damascus, he was struck blind by a blinding light and heard a voice: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” The Lord’s words became the motif of many of his writings: that Jesus and his followers are united as one. Renamed Paul, he became the Church’s greatest missionary, traveling throughout the Mediterranean world, founding churches, writing letters that became the New Testament, and finally giving his life as a martyr in Rome.



“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Acts 9:4

The Church Founded by Christ

Christ's Promise

The Catholic Church is the only one that was founded by Christ. It did not emerge as an organization formed by his followers after his death. Jesus gave it a structure and specific authority: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). Authority to teach, to govern, and to sanctify in his name. The Church is his body, his bride, his family, and he promised that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Not One Option Among Many

The authority Jesus gave the apostles did not die with them. Through the laying on of hands, that authority has been passed down in an unbroken line from the apostles to their successors, the bishops. The pope is Peter's successor and the visible head of the Church on earth. This is called apostolic succession, and it is what guarantees that the Church Jesus founded is the same Church that exists today.

“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew 16:18

The Four Marks of the Church

One and Holy

The Nicene Creed professes belief in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” These four marks are affirmations about what the Church is. One, because her source is the Trinity, her founder is Christ, and her soul is the Holy Spirit (see CCC 813). She is Holy not because all her members are perfect, but because Christ, her head, is holy and continuously sanctifies her through the sacraments and the work of the Spirit.

Catholic and Apostolic

The Church is Catholic, meaning “universal,” because she carries the fullness of Christ’s means of salvation to all peoples. She is Apostolic because she was built on the foundation of the apostles, holds their Faith intact, and governs through their successors, the bishops, in union with the Pope.

“There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.”

Ephesians 4:4–6

The Church as Mystical Body and Sacrament

The Mystical Body of Christ

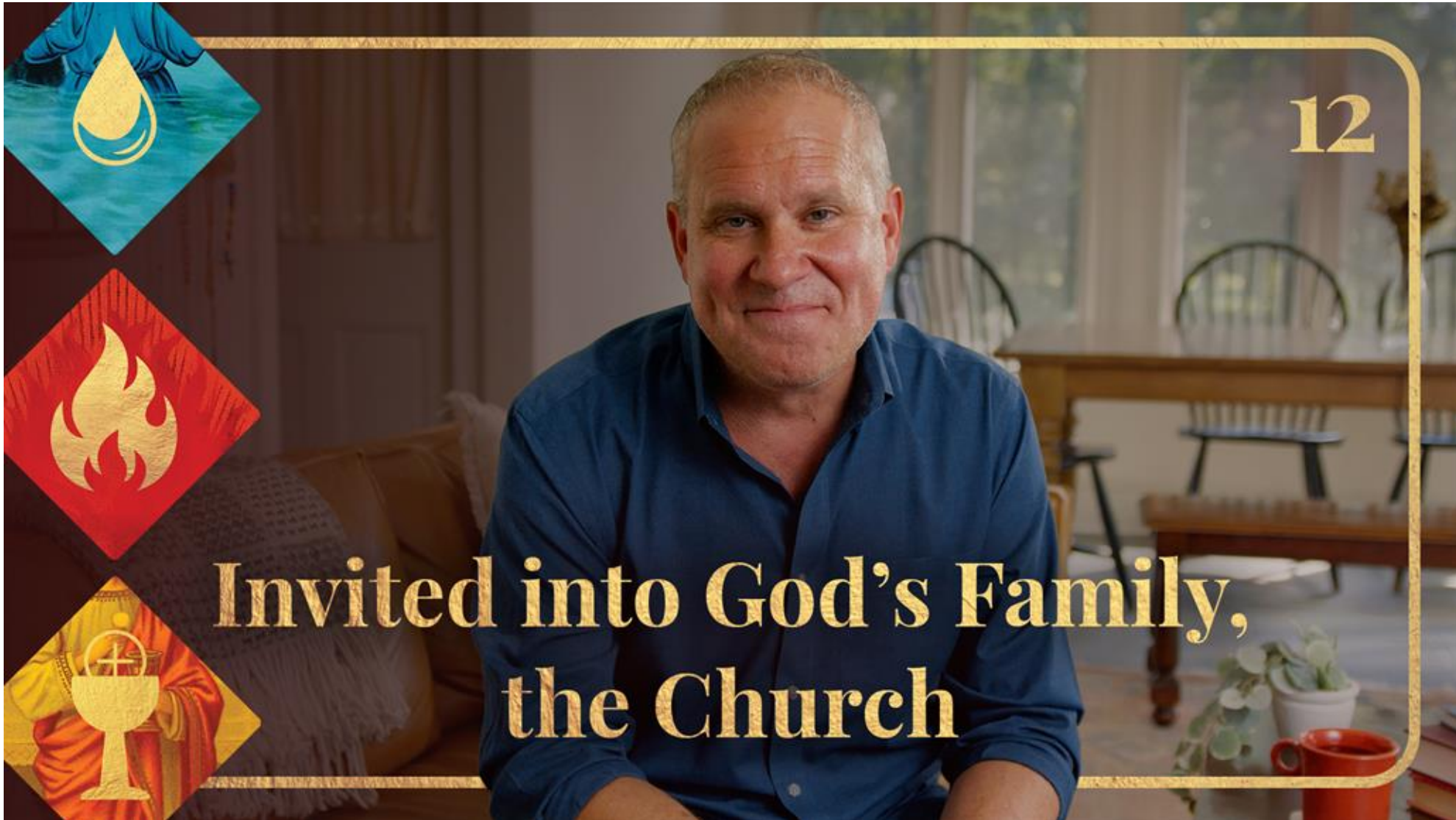
St. Paul's vision, while on the road to Damascus, is that Christ and his followers are one body. "He is the head of the body, the Church" (Colossians 1:18). Every baptized person is a living member, giving and receiving life from Christ the Head through the sacraments and through love of neighbor.

The Universal Sacrament of Salvation

The *Catechism* calls the Church "the sacrament of salvation" (CCC 780)—the visible sign of our communion with God and the source of his grace. This is why belonging to the Church is not optional for those who know her: she is the instrument Christ himself chose for the world's salvation.

"For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ."

Romans 12:4–5



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**Invited into God's Family,
the Church**

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Mark describes the Church as both “the family of God” and an institution with rules and structure. How do you reconcile these two aspects? How do they support each other?
- ❖ Can you think of specific Church teachings that initially felt restrictive but later revealed themselves to be protective or liberating?
- ❖ How does knowing that your local priest and bishop are part of a two-thousand-year succession affect your understanding of the sacraments you will receive?

Faith and Fun

What is the name of the smallest country in the world, which is also the “headquarters” of the Catholic Church?

a. Rome

b. Vatican City

c. Israel

d. Luxembourg

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Vatican City is where the pope resides and is the administrative center of the Church. The Basilica of St. Peter in Vatican City is built over the tomb of St. Peter, the first pope.

Vatican City is about 109 acres, smaller than many golf courses! It has around eight hundred residents, most of whom are clergy, members of religious orders, and Swiss Guards. Although it is small, it is a fully independent country, with its own post office, radio station, and even its own soccer team.

The Offertory Gifts

Bread, Wine, and Our Lives

At every Mass, after the Liturgy of the Word and the Prayer of the Faithful, members of the congregation bring forward the gifts of bread and wine. These are presented to the priest, who prepares the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The gifts are practical—bread and wine are needed for the Eucharist—but they are also symbolic.

What the Gesture Means

These gifts represent the entire offering of the People of God. Not only are we bringing up bread and wine, but also our lives, our intentions, our work, and our time. In this moment, the Church becomes visibly united, all members bringing something of themselves to be joined to Christ's perfect sacrifice. God takes what we offer and transforms it through Christ.



Living It Out:

Read your parish bulletin to see how different groups and ministries serve in your church. Choose one and pray intentionally for that group every day this week.

Closing Prayer

*Jesus Christ, you make us one Body
through the Spirit.*

*Thank you for the gift of your Church and for the
brothers and sisters you have placed in our lives.*

*Help us to walk together in faith, pray for one
another, and share your grace with the world.*

Amen.

Announcements / Reminders — add notes here