

# The Catholic Church Survives without Catholics



R. J. M. I.

By

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ,  
The Grace of the God of the Holy Catholic Church,  
The Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Our Lady of Good Counsel and Crusher of Heretics,  
The Protection of Saint Joseph, Patriarch of the Holy Family,  
The Intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel  
and the cooperation of

Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

To Jesus through Mary

*Júdica me, Deus, et discérne causam meam de gente non sancta:  
ab hómine iníquo, et dolóso érue me*

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam





“Christ is the head of the Church.”  
(Ephesians 5:23)

“The Church is a divine institution.”  
(Pope Leo XIII)

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## Warning

*The Catechism Explained*, by Spriago-Clarke, and *The History, Nature, & Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, by Fr. Riley, and *the Baltimore Catechism*, by the USA bishops, contain heresies and other errors. I never use books that contain heresy as a definitive source. For want of other English sources, I use them when the teachings conform to dogmas or to doctrines that belong to the ordinary magisterium or to refute the arguments or to expose the heresies in these books.

## Prophesied loss of faith, hierarchy, Catholic clerics, and legal Mass

It is a supernatural basic dogma that the Catholic Church on earth (the Church militant) survives even if there are no Catholics on earth. Old Testament prophecies speak of the loss of the hierarchy, priesthood, and the sacrifice (a legal Mass):

“And my sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd...” (Ez. 34: 1-6) “The holy man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men...” (Micheas 7:2-4) “The children of Israel shall sit many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without altar, and without ephod, and without theraphim.” (Osee 3:4) “And many days shall pass in Israel without the true God, and without a priest a teacher, and without the law.” (2 Par. 15:3)

These prophecies did not just apply to God’s chosen people, the Israelites, during the Old Covenant era but also to God’s chosen people, Catholics, during the New Covenant era. Hence these prophecies are a warning to Catholics of what will happen to them if they disobey God. Just as there was no legal priesthood and legal sacrifice for the disobedient and fallen-away Israelites for seventy years during the Babylonian exile, so also there is now no legal priesthood and legal sacrifice (Mass) for disobedient and fallen-away Catholics during these days of the Great Apostasy. Daniel indeed prophesied that these days would come when “*the continual sacrifice shall be taken away.*” (Dan. 12:11) Daniel’s prophecy has two meanings: one for the Old Covenant era when the animal sacrifices were replaced by Christ’s sacrifice during the New Covenant era, and one for the New Covenant era when there will be no legal Mass because of the Great Apostasy of Catholics who fall away from the Catholic faith and Catholic Church. No legal Mass means no legal priests, which means no Catholic priests. There has been no legal priesthood and legal Mass for quite some time now during these days of the Great Apostasy. This prophecy, linked with the deception of the elect *if possible* mentioned in Matthew 24:24, indicates there will still be valid Masses to attend but they will be illegal because they are said by non-Catholic priests and attended by non-Catholics, all of whom think they are Catholic: “*For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect.*” (Mt. 24:24) This prophecy also indicates that there will be an entity that falsely calls itself the Catholic Church since the elect cannot possibly be deceived by any entity that does not

call itself Catholic or look Catholic in many ways. Our Blessed Mother said that a day will come when the main sources of grace for Catholics will be the Holy Rosary, other prayers, and the Brown Scapular, which means there will be no legal Masses for Catholics to attend, which means no Catholic priests and ruling hierarchy. Here are some other prophecies regarding the loss of the hierarchy and Catholic clerics:

Saint Nilus, 1550: "After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th century... When the time for the advent of the Antichrist approaches... The Church of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all." (See Amos' prophecy of the famine of the word in Amos 8:11-12.)

Our Lady of Good Fortune (Quito Ecuador), 1634: "...At the end of the 19th century and for a large part of the 20th, various heresies will flourish on this earth... The precious light of the Faith will go out in souls... Priests will abandon their sacred duties... Then the Church will go through a dark night [The Eclipse] for lack of a Prelate and Father<sup>1</sup>... and numbers of priests will lose the spirit of God, thus placing their souls in great danger."

Pope Leo XIII, "Exorcism Prayer," 1888: "Her most crafty enemies have engulfed the Church, the Spouse of the Immaculate Lamb, with sorrows, they have drenched her with wormwood; on all Her desirable things they have laid their wicked hands. Where the See of Blessed Peter and the Chair of Truth have been set up for the light of the gentiles, there they have placed the throne of the abomination of their wickedness, so that the Pastor having been struck, they may also be able to scatter the flock."

Our Lady of LaSalette, 1846: "The priests, ministers of my Son, the priests, by their wicked lives... have become cesspools of impurity... The chiefs, the leaders of the people of God have neglected prayer and penance, and the devil has bedimmed their intelligence. They have become wandering stars which the old devil will drag along with his tail to make them perish... In the year 1864, Lucifer together with a large number of demons will be unloosed from hell; they will put an end to faith little by little, even in those dedicated to God. They will blind them in such a way, that, unless they are blessed with a special grace, these people will take on the spirit of these angels of hell; several religious institutions will lose all faith and will lose many souls... Evil books will be abundant on earth and the spirits of darkness will spread everywhere a universal slackening in all that concerns the service of God... Rome will lose the faith and become the see of Antichrist...<sup>2</sup> The Church will be in eclipse, the world will be in dismay... only faith will survive."

Jesus tells us that the faith will survive even if heaven and earth pass away. He says, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my word shall not pass away.*" (Mk. 13:31) That means even if there are no Catholic churches left on earth, the Catholic faith and Catholic Church will still survive. At LaSalette in 1846, the Blessed Virgin Mary said the same thing. She said, "The Church will be in eclipse, the world will be in dismay... only faith will survive." Jesus also tells us that so few will be faithful that it will appear as if the Catholic faith and Catholic Church are extinguished upon earth: "*Yet the Son of man,*

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<sup>1</sup> Here we read a prophecy about the vacant Holy See which states that there will be no pope (Father) to rule the Church. This truth has come to pass. The Church is going through Her dark night and has been eclipsed for more than forty years.

<sup>2</sup> The original Latin is "see" not "seat" of the Antichrist. This fits with the reign of the False Prophet in Rome who operates the see of the Antichrist and paves the road for him. The actual seat of the Antichrist will be in Jerusalem in the re-built Temple.

*when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?”* (Lk. 18:8) God’s ultimate punishment, then, is the famine of His word (the Catholic faith), which He has hid from almost all men during these days of the Great Apostasy because of their apostasy from God:

“Behold the days come, saith the Lord, and I will send forth a famine into the land: not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. And they shall move from sea to sea, and from the north to the east: they shall go about seeking the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.” (Amos 8:11-12)

This prophecy proves that at best there will be very few Catholics. One will have to search the whole world to find the Catholic faith. And even at that, it will be difficult but not impossible for those who are truly good-willed to find and embrace and live the Catholic faith. You see, folks, it is not a numbers game with God. Remember during the days of Noe when God flooded the whole world and killed all the men, women, and children, except eight—Noe and his family! And Jesus compared the days of Noe to these days of the Great Apostasy, which will usher in the Antichrist and then the second coming of Jesus Christ:

“And as in the days of Noe, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For, as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark: And they knew not till the flood came and took them all away: so also shall the coming of the Son of man be.” (Mt. 24:37-39)

The survival of the Catholic Church, then, does not depend upon how many Catholics are on earth:

St. Vincent Lerins, *Communitory*: “What then should a Catholic do if some portion of the Church detaches itself from communion of the universal Faith? What choice can he make if some new contagion attempts to poison, no longer a small part of the Church, but the whole Church at once? Then his great concern will be to attach himself to antiquity which can no longer be led astray by any lying novelty.”

Fr. William Jurgens: “At one point in the Church’s history, only a few years before Gregory’s [Nazianzus] present preaching (+380 A.D.), perhaps the number of Catholic bishops in possession of sees, as opposed to Arian bishops in possession of sees, was no greater than something between 1% and 3% of the total. Had doctrine been determined by popularity, today we should all be deniers of Christ and opponents of the Spirit. . . . In the time of the Emperor Valens (4th century), Basil was virtually the only orthodox Bishop in all the East who succeeded in retaining charge of his see. . . . If it has no other importance for modern man, a knowledge of the history of Arianism should demonstrate at least that the Catholic Church takes no account of popularity and numbers in shaping and maintaining doctrine: else, we should long since have had to abandon Basil and Hilary and Athanasius and Liberius and Ossius and call ourselves after Arius.”<sup>3</sup>

(See my book *Where Are the Catholic Bishops and Priests?*)

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<sup>3</sup> *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, by Jurgens, vol. 2, p. 39.

## **Church survives when there is no ruling hierarchy or Catholic bishops**

Just as there does not always have to be a pope at all times to preserve the papacy and perpetual papal succession, so also there does not always have to be even one Catholic bishop in the world to preserve the bishoprics and local sees. However, there always has to be the *ability* to fill the vacant offices. To say that the offices of the pope and bishops could never again be filled is heresy because it denies one of the four marks of the Catholic Church, the apostolic mark. The gates of hell would prevail over the Catholic Church by prevailing over its apostolic mark if the Catholic Church could never again have a pope or Catholic bishops.

### ***Papacy and bishoprics preserved even when vacant***

When the Catholic Church has no pope ruling Her, the papacy and perpetual papal succession are not lost. They are still intact waiting for the next pope to fill the papal office. Likewise, when the Catholic Church has no bishops ruling the local sees, the bishoprics and local sees are not lost. They are still intact waiting for the next bishops to fill the offices.

The Church infallibly teaches that the papacy will exist until the end of time and hence there will be a perpetual succession of popes from the time of St. Peter until the second coming of Christ:

*Vatican Council*, 1870: “1. That which our Lord Jesus Christ, the prince of shepherds and great shepherd of the sheep, established in the blessed apostle Peter, for the continual salvation and permanent benefit of the Church, must of necessity remain for ever, by Christ's authority, in the Church which, founded as it is upon a rock, will stand firm until the end of time... 5. Therefore, if anyone says that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord himself (that is to say, by divine law) that blessed Peter should have perpetual successors in the primacy over the whole Church; or that the Roman pontiff is not the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.”<sup>4</sup>

Perpetual papal succession has been preserved not just from the time of the Vatican Council but from the time of the first pope, Saint Peter:

Pope Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus*, 1846: “10. ...The Church has had an unbroken line of succession from Peter himself.”

The papacy and perpetual papal succession are not lost when the Holy See becomes vacant, such as when the pope dies and before the reign of the next pope. During these periods of time—some lasting over several years—the Church has no pope to rule Her. During these periods of time, the Holy See is vacant (*sedevacante*). Hence these periods of time are referred to as papal interregna, some of which lasted for several years. For instance, there was no pope ruling the Catholic Church for three years and seven months between the reigns of Pope St. Marcellinus and Pope St. Marcellus from October 25, 304, to June 26, 308. And there was no pope ruling the Church for two years and nine months

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<sup>4</sup> *Vatican Council*, 1870, sess. 4, chap. 2, On the permanence of the primacy of blessed Peter in the Roman pontiffs.

between the reigns of Pope Clement IV and Pope Gregory X from October 29, 1268, to September 1, 1271. During the times when no pope rules the Catholic Church, the Church does not defect and the papacy and perpetual papal succession are not lost. The papacy is preserved until the end of time, even during vacancies, and waits for the next pope to fill the office and continue the perpetual papal succession:

*Vatican Council, 1870*: “3. Therefore whoever succeeds to the chair of Peter obtains by the institution of Christ himself the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. So what the truth has ordained stands firm, and blessed Peter perseveres in the rock-like strength he was granted, and does not abandon that guidance of the Church which he once received.”<sup>5</sup>

This same principle applies to Catholic bishops. There will always be a perpetual succession of Catholic bishops even if there are no Catholic bishops in the whole world. The offices and local sees are still intact and waiting to be filled by Catholic bishops.

### ***False interpretation that there must be one bishop and a ruling hierarchy***

Beware of those who defend the heresy that there must always be at least one or some say two Catholic bishops alive in the world at all times. I will show how they take Church teachings out of context to defend their heresy. First, I will show how the below quote can be easily taken out of context to mean that a pope must be ruling the Church at all times or else the papacy and the Catholic Church would fail:

*The Catechism Explained, Spriago-Clarke, 1921*: “The mainstay of the Church is the Pope. He is the rock on which the Church rests; and his office secures the maintenance of unity. St. John Chrysostom says that the Church would fail if it were not for its Head, who is the center of its unity, as a ship would be wrecked if deprived of its pilot; and St. Cyprian adds that the enemies of the Church direct their attacks against its Head, in the hope that deprived of his guidance it may be shipwrecked.” (p. 223)

This quote can be taken out of context to mean that the very first time the Church had no pope when the Holy See was vacant, the Catholic Church failed and was shipwrecked because She had no head and was thus deprived of guidance. We know this is a false interpretation because the author had to be aware of the fact that the Holy See is always vacant between popes and sometimes for several years. The true interpretation, then, must be that the head of the Church remains even when there is no pope ruling the Church. The head remains in the office, which includes all the past popes’ decrees that are still in force. The same interpretation is to be used with dogmas that teach about the Catholic Church’s hierarchy and bishops ruling the Church. For instance, the following canon from the Council of Trent can be taken out of context to mean that there always has to be a ruling hierarchy, which consists of Catholic bishops:

*Council of Trent, Session 23, On the sacrament of order*: “Canon 6. If anyone saith that in the Catholic Church there is not a hierarchy by divine ordination instituted, consisting of bishops, priests and ministers; let him be anathema.”

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<sup>5</sup> *Vatican Council, 1870*, sess. 4, chap. 2.

The purpose of this canon is to condemn the Protestant heresy that denies the Catholic Church's hierarchic structure, which consists of the pope, bishops, priests, and ministers. However, the purpose of the canon is not to teach that there must *always* be a pope ruling the Church or bishops ruling local sees or priests ruling parish churches. If that were the case, then the hierarchic structure would be destroyed as soon as there was no pope ruling the Church or bishop ruling a local see or priest ruling a parish church. Therefore, the hierarchic structure of the Catholic Church always remains intact, even when the Holy See and local sees are vacant. The offices are still intact waiting to be filled. This canon, then, does not address the separate topic as to whether or not the Catholic Church needs to have at least one ruling bishop in the world or a ruling hierarchy. The purpose of this article is to show you that the Catholic Church does not need to have even one Catholic in the world to survive.

Even though epikeia makes it possible for Catholics to keep the faith and be holy when there is no pope or no ruling hierarchy or no Catholic bishops or no Catholic priests, that does not deny the dogma that the Catholic Church is a hierarchy consisting of the pope, bishops, priests, and ministers:

*The History, Nature, & Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*: "...It was the manifest and unmistakable intention of Jesus Christ, the Divine Founder of the Church, to establish it forever as a hierarchic-monarchical society. Nowhere in revelation is there any evidence of any intention to permit exceptions to, or changes in this constitution in future history, by the use of *epikeia* or on any other basis. Men are physically free, of course, to found other churches, differing in constitution and nature from that established by Christ. But such churches are not Christ's, and their very existence is opposed to the will of the Son of God. For by reason of the positively expressed will of its Divine Founder, the Church in its essence is to remain unchanged until the end of time."<sup>6</sup>

The point being made here, as well as in the above infallible Canon 4 from the Council of Trent, is that the hierarchic structure (the constitution) of the Catholic Church can never be changed, as the Protestants tried to do by denying it. Just because there is no pope ruling the Church does not mean the hierarchic structure of the papacy has been changed or eliminated. Just because there are no bishops ruling local sees does not mean that the hierarchic structure of the bishoprics and local sees has been changed or eliminated. Vacant sees do not equal a denial of the hierarchic structure (the constitution) of the Catholic Church. However, one would deny the hierarchic structure of the Catholic Church if he believed that it could ever be possible that the vacant sees could never again be filled with a pope and bishops and priests and ministers. (See in this book [Church survives when there is no ruling hierarchy or Catholic bishops](#), p. 10.) Hence the Catholic Church waits during these days of the Great Apostasy for a valid non-Catholic bishop to convert into the Catholic Church. The Church would then have a Catholic bishop. And once the Church gets a pope, the local sees can be filled. However, if Christ comes before that happens, then this world, as we know it, will end.

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<sup>6</sup> *The History, Nature, & Use of Epikeia in Moral Theology*, Fr. Lawrence Joseph Riley, A.B. S.T.L. Imprimatur +Ricardus Jacobus Cushing, D.D., May 7, 1948. The Catholic University of America Press. Chap. 7, art. 3, sec. 2, p. 330-31.

## **Church survives when there are no Catholic priests**

Even if there were no Catholic priests in the world, the Catholic Church would survive because She does not depend on mere men for Her survival. However, it is heresy to believe that there can never again be Catholic priests in the world. If there could never again be Catholic priests in the world, then there could never again be a pope ruling the Church nor bishops ruling the local sees and hence the gates of hell would have prevailed over the Church by destroying the apostolic mark of the Catholic Church.

Just because there may be no Catholic priests in a given country or even in the whole world does not deny the dogma regarding the divine institution of the Catholic priesthood.

Beware of those who take out of context the following canon from the Council of Trent to defend their heresy that in order to preserve the dogma of the priesthood there must always be at least one Catholic priest in the world:

*Council of Trent, Session 23: “Canon 1. If anyone saith that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood; or that there is not any power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins; but only an office and bare ministry of preaching the Gospel; or that those who do not preach are not priests at all; let him be anathema.”*

The purpose of this canon is not to teach that there always has to be Catholic priests in parishes or in the world but that the Catholic priesthood is a visible and external priesthood. And hence wherever Catholic priests are, they visibly and externally exercise their priesthood for all to see. The purpose of this canon is to condemn the Protestant heresies which teach that Christ did not institute a priesthood at all or that He instituted an invisible priesthood or that He instituted a priesthood which does not have the power to consecrate the body and blood of Christ or to forgive and retain sins or that He instituted a priesthood for preaching and nothing more.

There have been times in the history of the Catholic Church when Catholics had no access to Catholic priests for extended periods of time, but this did not mean that the Catholic priesthood was destroyed in those areas just because there were no visible priests externally performing their priestly functions there. The lack of Catholic priests does not deny the dogmas regarding the Catholic priesthood. Indeed, the Catholic priesthood is a visible and external priesthood, which all who have access to a Catholic priest when he performs his priestly functions can see with their own eyes. (See my book *Faith Before the Mass: Catholics who had no Catholic priest or Mass.*)

## **Catholics survive when there is no ruling hierarchy or Catholic clerics**

There is no reason for Catholics to panic when they find themselves without a pope or without access to Catholic clerics because there have been several times in the history of the Catholic Church when these things have occurred. (See my book *Faith Before the Mass: Catholics who had no Catholic priest or Mass.*) Epikeia makes it possible for Catholics to keep the faith and be holy when there is no pope or no ruling hierarchy or no

Catholic bishops or no Catholic priests. (See my book *Sacraments Without a Priest* and my book *Exemptions From the Law: Epikeia Is Needed during These Days of the Great Apostasy*.)

## **Church survives when there are no Catholics on earth**

Just because men cannot see the Holy Ghost does not mean the Holy Ghost does not exist. Just because the time has come when most men cannot see the Catholic Church does not mean the Catholic Church does not exist. Just because there may be no men on earth in whom the Holy Ghost dwells does not mean the Holy Ghost ceases to exist and is incapable of dwelling in men of good will when they prove themselves worthy. Just because there may be no men on earth who are inside the Catholic Church does not mean the Catholic Church ceases to exist and is incapable of bringing good-willed men inside Her when they prove themselves worthy.

### ***Christ is the ultimate Head of the Catholic Church***

The survival of the Catholic Church depends upon Christ alone and no mere man. Mere men can fall away from the Catholic faith and hence fall outside the Catholic Church, but Jesus Christ can never fall away. Even the pope can fall into public heresy and lose his papal office and hence no longer be the head of the Catholic Church on earth,<sup>7</sup> but Christ can never lose His office as the supreme Head of the Catholic Church in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory. St. Paul teaches that Christ is the “*head over all the church.*” (Eph. 1:20-22) And again he teaches that “*Christ is the head of the church.*” (Eph. 5:23) And again he teaches that Christ “*is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he may hold the primacy.*” (Col. 1:17-19) While Christ has commissioned the pope to be the head of His Catholic Church on earth, Christ is the ultimate Head of the Catholic Church. It is Christ who preserves and protects the Catholic Church in spotless purity and preserves and protects the papacy and bishoprics even when there is no pope ruling the Catholic Church and no bishops ruling the local sees.

### ***The Catholic Church is divine and mere men are not***

The Catholic Church is not a human institution but a divine institution:

Pope Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus*, 1897: “6. ...That the Church is a divine institution is most clearly proved by the splendour and glory of those gifts and graces with which she is adorned, and whose author and giver is the Holy Ghost.”

The Catholic Church is above mere men because She is divine and mere men are not divine. Men belong to the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church does not belong to men. To be saved, men must belong to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church does not need to be saved, and She certainly does not need to belong to mere men to be divine. Men depend on the Catholic Church for their existence and salvation, but the Catholic

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<sup>7</sup> See my book *A Public Heretic Cannot Be Pope*.

Church does not depend on mere men for Her existence. If the whole world down to the last man lost the faith—as Jesus says is possible when He said, “*The Son of man, when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?*” (Lk. 18:8)—the Catholic Church would still exist and wait for men to enter Her. She exists in Her vacant offices and Her teachings and decrees that can be found if one wholeheartedly seeks the truth.

Never has a pope infallibly taught that there always has to be at least five, two, or even one Catholic alive for the Catholic Church to survive. If he did, he would be denying that the Church is divine, above mere men. He would also imply that Jesus lied in Luke 18:8 when He speaks of the possibility of there being not one Catholic on earth. Every Catholic has the potential of falling away from the Catholic faith and hence outside the Catholic Church. But that does not mean the Catholic Church falls away and ceases to exist just because a Catholic fell away and ceased to be Catholic. Men can stop being Catholic, but the Catholic Church can never stop being the Catholic Church. Even if every Catholic on earth stopped being Catholic, the Catholic Church would still exist and still be the Catholic Church. Dear reader, if you were the last Catholic on earth, do you actually think that the existence of the Catholic Church would depend on you remaining Catholic so that if you lost the faith the Catholic Church would cease to exist? Would that not be to place yourself as divine and the Catholic Church as a mere human institution? Would that not give you the power to single-handedly destroy the Catholic Church and faith! No, dear reader, God and His Catholic Church do not need any of us sinful men who are but dust and slime of the earth. Rather, we all need God and His Catholic Church if we want to be saved.

### ***“Catholics are the Catholic Church” in correct context***

The below teaching that “Catholics are the Catholic Church” must be taken in correct context:

*Baltimore Catechism*, No. 2: Lesson Eleventh: On the Church: “**115. Q.** What is the Church? **A.** The Church is the congregation of all those who profess the faith of Christ, partake of the same Sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head.”

*The Catechism Explained*: “The Catholic Church is often called the... ‘community of the faithful.’ ... ‘The Church is the people of God scattered through the world,’ say St. Augustine.”<sup>8</sup>

St. Athanasius: “Even if Catholics faithful to tradition are reduced to a handful,” says St. Athanasius, “they are the ones who are the true Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

In the strict sense, Catholics are not the Catholic Church but only members of the Catholic Church because the Catholic Church is divine and Catholics are not and can never be divine. The Catholic Church does not depend on any mere man for Her existence. If a Catholic were the Catholic Church and he fell away from the Church, then

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<sup>8</sup> *The Catechism Explained*, Rev. Francis Spirago, Professor of Theology. Edited by Rev. Richard F. Clarke, S.J. Nihil Obstat: Arthur J. Scanlon, S.T.D., Censor Librorum. Imprimatur: +Patrick J. Hayes, D.D., Archbishop of New York, New York, October 18, 1921. Copyright 1899, 1921 by Benzinger Brothers, NY. Published by Tan Books, 1993. Ninth Article of the Creed: The Catholic Church: 1. The Catholic Church and its institution, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> St. Athanasius, Coll. Selecta SS. Eccl. Patrum. Caillu and Guillou, Vol. 32, pp. 411-412.

the Catholic Church would fall away with him or follow him and change Her identity. For instance, a person who works for the IBM Corporation is not IBM but a member of IBM. If that person stopped working for IBM, IBM would not cease to exist or change its identity by following that person.

With this truth in mind, we can understand the correct meaning of the saying, “The Catholic Church is the community of the faithful.” It means that a Catholic is part of and one with the Catholic Church so that one can identify the teachings and ways of the Catholic Church by observing and listening to a faithful Catholic. Likewise, one can learn about IBM by observing how its members think and act but that does not mean the members are IBM. Hence the oneness Catholics have with the Catholic Church identifies them with the Catholic Church but does not make them the Catholic Church. Jesus compares this oneness that faithful Catholics have with Him and His Catholic Church to the oneness He has with God the Father:

“And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me; That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as we also are one.” (Jn. 17:20-22)

The oneness Jesus speaks about that He has with His Father and Catholics is oneness in faith and obedience to God but not oneness in the divinity that Jesus shares with the Father since Catholics are not God. This is what St. Peter means when he says that Catholics “*may be made partakers of the divine nature.*” (2 Pt. 1:4) St. Peter does not mean Catholics can become divine but only that they may share in some of the attributes of the divine nature, such as by thinking, feeling, and acting as God does in all ways possible for a creature but not in every way. Surely Catholics cannot be one with God the Father exactly as Jesus is one with God the Father because Jesus is God and hence is one with the Father not only in faith and obedience but also in divinity, which Catholics can never be. No matter how much Catholics are like unto God, they can never be God! Thus even though Catholics are said to be one with God, they are not God. And likewise, even though Catholics are said to be one with the Catholic Church—“*For in one body we have many members*” (Rom. 12:4)—Catholics are not the Catholic Church. St. Paul compares a Catholic’s relationship with Christ and His Catholic Church to a wife’s relationship with her husband and his house:

“Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of his body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things.” (Eph. 5:22-24)

And Jesus says that a wife is to become one with her husband: “*For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh.*” (Mt. 19:5) Even though a wife is subject to her husband and is a member of his house and even though a wife is one with her husband and his house, she is not her husband and not his house. For instance, if a Catholic husband dies in mortal sin and goes to hell, his Catholic wife does not follow him to hell if she dies in a state of grace. Likewise, even though a Catholic is subject to Christ and is a member of His Catholic Church and even though a Catholic is one with Christ and His Catholic Church, a Catholic is not Christ and not His Catholic Church. For instance, if a Catholic falls

outside the Catholic Church because of heresy, the Catholic Church does not follow him because She is always holy, pure, and spotless. If either the husband and the wife or the Catholic and the Catholic Church were one in the strict sense, both would always share the same fate!

The correct context, then, of statements in which Catholics are said to be God or to be the Catholic Church is that they are like unto God and like unto the Catholic Church, but they are not God and are not the Catholic Church in the strict sense. This being true, it is not prudent nowadays to say in the non-strict sense that Catholics are the Catholic Church or Catholics are God because the whole world is infected with humanism and thus these statements can easily be taken out of context in a heretical sense to make men into God.

## **Definition of the Church and congregation of the faithful**

The Catholic Church is Christ's body on earth and hence is a divine institution that consists of God's revelations to mankind, the inerrant meaning of those revelations, and the jurisdiction to rule, teach, and sanctify mankind. The Catholic Church exists in Her jurisdiction, hierarchic structure, solemn and ordinary magisterial teachings on faith and morals, disciplinary laws that are in force, priesthood, and sacraments—all of which exist even if there were no Catholics on earth.

The congregation of the faithful or the congregation of Catholics throughout the world is united by professing the same faith, partaking in the same sacraments, and being governed by lawful pastors under one head.