

Vatican II and the Year of Faith:
On Music, Coffee, and the Catholic Faith

A non-Catholic prodded my daughter recently, "Would you consider joining *my* Church?" Some of my kids' peers worship where they prefer the music or activities, where they serve Starbucks Coffee during the services, or where the pastors give out well-crafted, feel-good messages. The appeal is real, especially for music-loving, coffee drinking youngsters. So, this invitation led us, as a family, to discuss why we are Catholic, why we go to Mass, and why we need the Church.

The simplest answer is the first one I gave my daughter: "Serving coffee doesn't make you the Church Christ founded." But there is a lot more we can say. *Why* did Christ found a Church? Why not just save us as individuals? Why shouldn't I be content with my personal relationship to God? Why not just worship where I feel most comfortable, regardless of denomination? These questions go to the heart of why we are Catholic, what it means to know God, and to be saved.

The New Testament book of Ephesians offers a beautiful catechesis on the Church. St. Paul teaches that it was never God's design to save us only as individuals, but rather to create a beautiful harmony and unity throughout the whole human race - centered in Christ.

It was his loving design, centered in Christ, to give history its fulfillment by resuming everything in him, all that is in heaven, all that is on earth, summed up in him. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

This harmony is called the Body of Christ, The Church: "We, though many in number, form one body in Christ." (Romans 12:5) "[Christ] too is that head whose body is the Church." (Colossians 1:18) So the way God intends to save the world, to bring about that unity and harmony is through the Church:

He [Christ] has made the two nations one . . . both sides, united in a single body . . . In him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple, dedicated to the Lord. (Ephesians 2:14-22)

This is lofty theology, but it has a very practical application. We cannot attain harmony if we constantly disagree on the content of the faith or the moral life. This is why God established the Church's Sacred Magisterium: so that, through the Church, we might know His will with clarity and certainty. St. Paul, again, teaches this most clearly:

Some he has appointed to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, or pastors, or teachers. They are to order the lives of the faithful, minister to their needs, build up the frame of Christ's body, **until we all realize our common unity through faith in the Son of God**, and fuller knowledge of him. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Sometimes non-Catholics will argue that this unity is "spiritual," that the true Church is invisible, and that complete agreement is not necessary. But this is not true. St. Paul commanded the Corinthians:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be **perfectly united in mind and thought**. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Jesus, himself, teaches that the Church is visible and unified. He commanded that scandal and dissension be handled by appeal to the authority of the Church. (Matthew 18: 15-20) But, it would be impossible to obey this command if we could not identify the Church visibly with clarity and certainty.

The Church not only teaches us the faith, but She also transmits that unifying grace of God through her sacraments. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism," says Paul. (Ephesians 4:5) "Whoever has been baptised has been clothed with Christ." (Galatians 3:27) " Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

The Second Vatican Council captured this beauty and power of the Church in a rich simile: the Church is like a sacrament. According to the Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*: "The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race." A sacrament is a sign that makes present the thing signified. In this case, the thing signified is unity. The Church is both its sign and instrument.

I love coffee as much as the next guy, also good music, and a well-crafted speech. (And I get plenty of these as a Catholic, by the way.) But I go to Mass to be reconciled to God, and to receive the grace needed to be reconciled to neighbor. This is how Christ designed it. This is why we need the Church. One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.