



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Four Marks of the Church: How is the Church *Apostolic*?”

For the final mark of the Church, we will now turn to how it is *apostolic*. First off, the Greek word “ἀπόστολος” (transliterated: apóstolos) means “messenger” or “he who is sent.” In the literal sense, one can say that the Church is apostolic insofar as she is *sent* on a mission to bring salvation to the world through Christ. The Catechism tells us that the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles (CCC 857). We can also see this through scripture as Christ commissioned the twelve to prepare the way for the carrying out of his mission. The Church then receives all that she has heard from the apostles, then keeps, safeguards, and hands on these teachings. These teachings that are passed on are commonly referred to as the Deposit of Faith.

This leads to the second sense in which the Church is apostolic – its bishops in union with the successor of Peter (the Pope), assisted by priests, carry out this message of the apostles from which the apostles received from Christ himself. This, of course, is great news for us because we know that the teachings of the Church have been preserved in its integrity since the beginning of the history of Christianity. This apostolic succession and safeguarding of the teachings of Christ is precisely what Christ meant when he said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. It cannot prevail because the truth is proclaimed without any abandonment of the teachings of Christ throughout all of these years.

We can identify the apostolicity of the Church by seeing that the Catholic Church is the only place where you can find an unbroken line of successors to the apostles, with a designated leader that traces back to Peter, the first Pope. It is because of this that the teachings which we receive even up to this day are as if we were receiving the message directly from the mouth of Christ himself. This, of course, refers to the teachings regarding the faith and morality. This is not the case for the individual opinions or prudential judgments put forth by the Pope or the Bishops, although even these should carry weight in and of itself as long as it is in harmony with the unchangeable teachings of the Church.

What is commonly missed when discussing this mark of the Church is that this apostolic mission is not limited to clergy. There is a sense in which it is extended out to all of us, as members of the body of Christ, who are on a mission to contribute to the spreading of the Gospel message to the world. However, it is not our individual message, but the message of Christ preserved by his apostles and by the bishops of the Catholic Church. The role of the layperson then, is to faithfully carry out this Gospel both in word and deed, doing their part in contribution to the whole of the body.

It is through recognizing the four marks of the Church that we can discover which is the one Church which contains within it the fullness of truth inasmuch as it is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

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