



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

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

This week is a great opportunity to consider the meaning of the Church being holy, in light of the recent scandals that have been exposed in recent news. Following the same line of reasoning as last week about the Church being “one,” let’s examine what it means so say that the Church was, is, and always will be *holy*. The Church is holy because Christ who is alone *truly* holy, sanctifies her by joining the Church to himself as his body (CCC 823). If you recall from last week, I said that the Church was not a human institution, but a divine one. Because of this, the Church as a divine institution and as the body of Christ, acts toward the sanctification of men. Christ, who is said to be the “head” of the Church insofar as all holiness of the body flows from Christ who is the Head. So, his hands and feet (the Church) are in place to work through him, with him, and in him towards making others holy through His divine grace. Think about it, how could the Church itself be unholy, yet sanctify men in the process? This would be impossible since one cannot give what one does not have. Therefore, the Church is made holy through Christ as its Head. All of the grace that is conferred through the sacraments have nothing to do with the individual men who are part of the Church, but rather, the grace is conferred *ex opere operato* – by the work worked. In other words, the sacraments are efficacious not because the people in the Church are holy (which some are not), or even that the priests are holy (some of which are not either), but because the work of salvation was worked by Christ and the grace of the sacraments flow from Him. Once more, the Church is not holy because of those who are in it, the Church is holy because Christ himself attached himself to it and made it his body. The Church is the bride and Christ who is the bridegroom. Just like in any true marriage the two are unified as “one flesh.” Just as the Church is one, the Church is also holy for the same reason.

The people within the Church and even its leaders (including the Pope) are sinners. We are *all* human and therefore have the capacity to either willfully choose evil, or to make a mistake like any other human. Even papal infallibility does not exclude the pope from doing something sinful since he is, after all, human. The infallibility only pertains to a definitive teaching the pope makes with regard to the faith and morals of the Church. For this reason, we do not leave the Church because of sinners, we remain with the Church because of its intimate union with Christ as its Head. For another way to look at it, we don’t leave the Church because of Judas, we remain with the Church because of Christ, since it is Christ himself who sanctifies it. When things get tough, we cannot desert the Church, but should instead push to restore it toward its true nature as the hands and feet of Christ. If we are ever tempted to leave the One, Holy Church, we should turn to Christ and reflect on the words of St. Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68). Since the Church contains the fullness of truth, indeed we must ask ourselves, “to whom shall we go except to the Church which contains this truth in its fullness?” What else would we go to other than to the Eucharist? Where else other than His Church which is made holy not by men, but by Him and through Him.

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