

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH

- The Church is the continuation of Jesus' presence and ministry in the world. Jesus gathered twelve special disciples (apostles) (Mark 3:13-19) and commissioned them to continue his work of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom to the world.
- The Church is the new Israel built upon the twelve apostles (relate to selection of Mathias to take the place of Judas) and given the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect it. Ten days later is Pentecost (Acts 2).
- Pentecost changes apostles and disciples. They now proclaim fearlessly the Gospel, and by the power of God's Holy Spirit which was in Jesus, they perform the same miracles which he did.
- The life of the community is bonded in faith and love (Acts 2:43f and 4:32f). The Church's life is the activity of the Holy Spirit working through the gifts and love of its members.

The Church grows:

- Among the Jews as a Jewish sect (followers of Jesus believed that the messianic expectation had been fulfilled in him and were now waiting for the second coming). Worship continued at the temple as well as in the homes for Eucharist.

- Peter is head of the apostles. He articulates the faith of the Church and is given the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:16), and is told to support his brothers (John 21:15). The present Pope Francis is the Successor of St Peter as have been all his predecessors.
- Catholic roots go deeper as Church spreads to the Gentiles (Acts 15). Catholic also means that the Church is in full visible union with the Apostolic See of Rome. Protestant churches broke away from the Catholic Church in the 16th century – hence the name '*protestant*'
- Destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. by the Romans ends the worship of the temple and Jewish domination of Church. Now it spreads rapidly among the Gentiles and becomes universal (catholic). Various rites develop in different areas (later to be known as Roman or Byzantine).
- Jesus does not return and the apostles are dying. Church needs ways to protect the Gospel and teaching, now that the first-hand witnesses are getting less and less. New situations and problems raise new questions not directly answered by Jesus.
- So, the Church begins to develop its structure to respond to these needs:
- **Tradition:** the way the Church had prayed, taught, believed, worshipped, etc., from the beginning.

- **Bishops:** each community by end of first century had a bishop with priests to assist him. The bishops were taught or ordained by an apostle or someone who had been with Jesus. The Church trusted the authority and teaching which maintained this connection with the apostles.
- **Creeds:** statements were written which attempted to capture the basic truths of faith. If people could profess the creeds, then they were considered orthodox believers.
- **Scriptures:** the Old Testament was used as a norm alongside of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. Some of the teachings and Gospel versions began to be written, as well as letters from the apostles or other early Church letters to the various Christian communities. Over a period of time, these writings began to be accepted as inspired of God and as ways to know the truth of Jesus and his teachings.
- **Councils:** beginning in the early fourth century, gatherings of the bishops with the Pope to discuss doctrine and other matters of concern. The conclusions of the councils were accepted as authority and as ways in which the Holy Spirit guided the Church as promised.
- **Summary:** The Church is the continuation of the work of Jesus. It contains the full revelation of Christ, and continues to teach and guide with the protection of the Holy Spirit and with the authority of the apostles.
- It is "**catholic**" because it is a universal Church, open to all peoples, races and economic levels, and because it accepts a wide variety of rites and theologies, and because it respects truth and the presence of God wherever God is at work.
- "**Catholic**" also means that the church is in full visible union with the Apostolic See of Rome and with the Pope who is the Successor of St Peter.