

# **My Catholic Faith! Study Group**

## **Session 7 - The Gift of the Church**

### **Pre-meeting Prep**

Participants should be asked to read Chapter Seven of the *My Catholic Faith!* book prior to this meeting.

### **5 minutes - Gather**

Snacks and informal social time as people gather. Try to be punctual and gather everyone together no longer than 5 minutes after the scheduled starting time.

### **5 minutes - Opening prayer and Scripture**

Everyone sits quietly as the leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and then invites a period of silence in the following way:

***Let us quiet ourselves as we begin this study of our glorious Catholic faith together. "Lord, as we sit here for a minute in silence, help each one of us to bring our own questions, concerns, fears, and joys to You. Help us, in this moment of silence, to be attentive to Your gentle voice speaking to us, directing us, and calling us to a deeper faith."***

Take about a minute in silence with eyes closed so that each person can speak to our Lord about their own particular cares and concerns.

Leader reads the following invitation: ***Let us ponder the Word of God. Let us reflect upon our own faith journey with the following questions: Do I believe? How deep is my faith? Am I open to letting God speak to me? Am I open to the Word of God and willing to let God's truth sink in more deeply? Am I willing to let this new faith change my life?***

The leader of the night prayerfully reads the following Scriptures, one at a time, pausing for about 30 seconds between each verse:

**Matthew 16:17-19**: Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

**1 Peter 2:4-10**: Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in scripture: "Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone,

chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame." Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall." They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny. But you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were "no people" but now you are God's people; you "had not received mercy" but now you have received mercy.

1 Corinthians 3:6-13: I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Leader then says: ***Let us take a moment in silence reflecting upon these words.*** (a minute of silence)

The Leader invites everyone to pray the following prayer:

***Lord, I thank You for the gift of Your Church. Thank You for making Your Church united as one. Help me to always help build up that unity.***

***Lord, I thank You for the gift of Your Church. Thank You for making Your Church holy. May the holiness of Your Church always shine brightly as a beacon of light for all to see.***

***Lord, I thank You for the gift of Your Church. Thank You for making Your Church Catholic. As "Catholic," Your Church is open to all people. May all people come to discover the riches of Your grace in the Church.***

***Lord, I thank You for the gift of Your Church. Thank You for making Your Church apostolic.***

***May I always strive to be an instrument by which many souls are brought to You in Your Church.***

The prayer time concludes with everyone professing the Apostles Creed:

***I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.***

#### **45-50 minutes - Discussion questions**

Each person should be invited to share something or ask a question, if he/she chooses, regarding the questions/discussion starters below. Go through one question at a time, and give each person an opportunity to say something if he/she chooses. Avoid having one or two persons dominate the discussion. Go around the circle and do not be afraid to share! Your insights might assist someone else in their understanding of the topics. Your question might very well be the same question someone else has. Some of the questions below will invite a personal sharing; other questions will invite you to share with others what you read in Chapter Seven. The goal is to share personally and to also make sure that the faith of our Church is clearly expressed and understood by all.

1. There is a fine distinction between the “Church of Christ” and the “Catholic Church.” Do you understand this distinction? Discuss what this means.
2. Discuss briefly the various ways the Church is described as:
  1. People of God
  2. Body of Christ
  3. Sheepfold
  4. Cultivated Field
  5. Building of God
  6. The Bride of Christ
  7. Temple of the Holy Spirit
  8. Our Mother
3. The Church is both physical and spiritual. Therefore, it is spoken of in an analogous way as a Sacrament. Discuss what this means.
4. The Four Marks of the Church are: One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic. Discuss what each one of these means. How do you see the Church fulfilling each one of these aspects of its life?

5. The Church includes those in the hierarchy. How is this different from “higher-archy?”
6. The hierarchy includes the Magisterium. What is your understanding of the role of the Magisterium within the Church?
7. Discuss the threefold office to preach, shepherd, and sanctify. How is this accomplished within the Church? Share experiences of how you have felt Christ minister to you through these threefold means.
8. Discuss the role of the laity in the Church, both lay and consecrated. How has the role of the laity changed over the past several decades? Any suggestions on how else it should change?

### **20 minutes - Final Reflections and sharing**

Go around and give each person an opportunity to share any final thoughts. What stood out to each of you the most? Do you have any lingering questions or confusion that others can help clarify?

### **5 minutes - Closing prayer**

The leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and invites a minute of silence with all eyes closed. Each person should reflect upon what was discussed tonight, especially what stood out to him/her the most.

The leader then prays the following prayer:

***Lord, Jesus, I thank You for Your Church. May I always seek to be a true member of Your Body, the Church.***

***Lord, at times Your Church carries wounds as a result of the sins of its members. Bring healing and grace in times of need.***

***Be with Your vicar on earth, our holy father the pope. Give him the grace, strength, and wisdom he needs to lead Your people to Heaven.***

***Be with our bishops, priests, and deacons. Help them to live out the calling they have received at their ordination.***

***Lord, lead all those called to the consecrated life to deeper holiness. May their vocation be one that brings an abundance of good fruit into our world in such need.***

***Lord, we pray for all the lay faithful. May each member of Your Body, the Church, renew their baptismal calling every day, so as to be a better sign of Your love and mercy in the world.***

Leader then invites everyone present to offer their own prayer in the following way (Note: This can be done out loud, but it might be preferable if it's done in silence at the discretion of the leader):

***Let us now each bring our own personal concerns before our Lord, trusting that He hears us and knows all we need. Let us entrust these prayers to Him with full confidence that He desires to take control.*** (Take a minute of silence for each person to speak to God about their own personal needs for the night).

Leader then invites everyone to close with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.