

Concerning one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

The Holy Church was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). The purpose of Christ's Church is the salvation of man. It is only in the Church that full union of man and God takes place, and this union is the basic condition for salvation.

By His suffering on the Cross the Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for human sin (John 1:29; Heb. 7:27) and by His Holy Blood He founded the Church (Acts 20:28), so that in her we might live by Him and for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Therefore there is no guarantee of salvation outside of the Church.

We are brought to the Church by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; for the Lord said that He would found the Church on the confession of faith (Matt. 16:18). Members of the Church are justified by God's grace (Rom. 3:24-30) and saved by God's power (Rom. 1:16) through faith in Christ and His Resurrection (Rom. 10:9) and by works of faith (James 2:17-26).

The Church is One as the Lord Who founded her is One (John 10:18). The Church is Holy, for she lives, acts, and thinks by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 8:15; 9:17). The Church is Catholic, for her flock has one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32) and her catholicity is dominant. The Church is Apostolic, for she keeps the Apostolic Succession by the laying-on of hands upon the hierarchs (Acts 6:6; 14:23; 20:28), and sacredly holds the Apostolic Tradition (2 Thess. 2:15).

St. Paul calls the Church the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and this definition of the Church as Christ's Body is not a symbol or abstraction, but an expression of the Church's real mystical life, indicating the real union of God and man in Christ.

On one hand, as founded by God, the Church received her being and exists outside the usual order of human life and cannot be compared with it because she is a phenomenon full of profound mystery. On the other hand, however, the Church is a community of people united by their Orthodox faith, its doctrine, the hierarchy, and the Sacraments. The human side is changeable and imperfect, but the Church is Holy and Divine because she is sanctified by the Blood of Jesus Christ and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Who gives mankind true life in God.

The Church serves to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, for she was preordained by Christ to serve as a means of transfiguring the world in the Light of the Gospel Truth and to become the leaven for the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:33). The Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth, for she is the Church of the living God, Who is Truth itself. Therefore everything in her is true the confession of faith, sanctification by the Sacraments, the bestowal of grace, life according to God life upheld by God in her, God's help and His promises. The words the pillar and bulwark express the truth's firmness, immutability, and changelessness.

The Apostles, like Christ Himself, teach only one Church; they teach the unity of all in God: There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6).

The unity of the Church is founded on the mutual love of all the members of the Church: If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12). For it is precisely in that we share the bonds of love that we constitute the Church, the true Body of Christ, and for this reason the Lord commands us to love one another (John 15:17). It is by prayer offered in unity of spirit that the unity of the Church is achieved.

The unity of the Church exists by the power of the Divine Grace in the Holy Spirit. The unity of all the members of the Church with Christ and between one another exists in its highest form in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The unity of the Church is protected by the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils, the rules of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and Holy Tradition. The existence of Local Orthodox Churches does not contradict the unity of the Church. The fact that they are separate in their visible organization does not prevent them from being spiritually larger members of the one body of the Universal Church, or from sharing the One Head, Christ, and the one spirit of faith and grace. This unity is given visible expression by a single confession of faith and by communion in prayer and the Sacraments. The Local Orthodox Churches continually maintain Eucharistic Communion, honor and respect the traditions of every Church, and always show one another their concern in mutual love.

If the Church is a unity, she is also divine and holy by her nature and essence. She was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and sanctified by His Passion and His Holy Blood. The Church is sanctified by the power of Christ the Savior's prayers (John 17:11-19). The Church is also holy by virtue of Christ's teaching. Through the glad tidings of the Gospel the Lord reveals His will to men, calls them to salvation and indicates the way to salvation and sanctity (Heb. 4:12).

The Holy Spirit, dwelling permanently in the Church, fills her with His sanctifying grace (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit sanctifies man and awakens him to deeds of selflessness and sanctity (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rom. 8:1-15). Divine service, the Sacraments, sermon, ritual, singing, fasting, prayer, icon, and architecture everything bears the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit and is directed towards the salvation of man.

The great assembly of Saints in the Orthodox Church is a living testimony to the sanctity of the Church. This is a proof of the reality of the life and action of Divine Grace in the souls of men. The Church is also holy through the lives of those of her children who, striving for Christian perfection, have devoted themselves entirely to the fulfillment of the will of God, of His Holy Commandments.

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