

Ten After Ten, Session 42: The Church; People of God and Body of Christ

781 At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him. He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness... All these things, however, happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ.

782 The People of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, ethnic, political, or cultural groups found in history:

—It is the People of God: God is not the property of any one people. But he acquired a people for himself: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.”

—One becomes a member of this people not by a physical birth, but... by faith in Christ, and Baptism.

—This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is “the messianic people.”

—Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us.

—Its mission is to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

—Its destiny, finally, is the Kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it has been brought to perfection by him at the end of time.

783 Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king. The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them.

784 On entering the People of God through faith and Baptism, one receives a share in this people’s unique, priestly vocation...The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.

785 The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office... (we) become Christ’s witness in the midst of this world.

786 Finally, the People of God shares in the royal office of Christ. He exercises his kingship by drawing all men to himself through his death and Resurrection...The People of God fulfills its royal dignity by a life in keeping with its vocation to serve with Christ.

787 From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings.²¹⁵ Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him... And he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

788 When his visible presence was taken from them, Jesus did not leave his disciples orphans. He promised to remain with them until the end of time; he sent them his Spirit. As a result communion

with Jesus has become, in a way, more intense: by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation.

789 Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ.

790 Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body, become intimately united with him: in that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his Passion and glorification.

791 The body's unity does not do away with the diversity of its members...The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful... Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions.

793 Christ unites us with his Passover: all his members must strive to resemble him. For this reason we... are taken up into the mysteries of his life,... associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified.

794 Christ provides for our growth: to make us grow toward him, our head, he provides in his Body, the Church, the gifts and assistance by which we help one another along the way of salvation.

795 Christ and his Church thus together make up the "whole Christ." The Church is one with Christ.

Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man.

796 The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride.

This is the whole Christ, head and body, one formed from many... whether the head or members speak, it is Christ who speaks. He speaks in his role as the head and in his role as body. What does this mean? "The two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church." And the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh." They are, in fact, two different persons, yet they are one in the conjugal union,... as head, he calls himself the bridegroom, as body, he calls himself "bride."