

## Ten After Ten, Session 41: The Mystery of the Church

763 The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures. To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."

764 The seed and beginning of the Kingdom are the "little flock" of those whom Jesus came to gather around him, the flock whose shepherd he is. They form Jesus' true family. To those whom he thus gathered around him, he taught a new "way of acting" and a prayer of their own.

765 The Lord Jesus endowed his community with a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved. Before all else there is the choice of the Twelve with Peter as their head (who) share in Christ's mission and his power.

766 The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus.

767 "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church.

768 So that she can fulfill her mission, the Holy Spirit bestows upon [the Church] varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her.

769 "The Church... will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven," at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day, the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations.

770 The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only with the eyes of faith that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life.

771 The Church is at the same time:

—a society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ;

—the visible society and the spiritual community;

—the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches.

772 It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: "to unite all things in him." St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church "a great mystery."

773 The Church's structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the 'great mystery' in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom.

774 The seven sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body. The Church, then, both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies. It is in this analogical sense, that the Church is called a “sacrament.”

775 “The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.” The Church’s first purpose is to be the sacrament of the inner union of men with God. Because men’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race. In her, this unity is already begun, since she gathers men “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues”; at the same time, the Church is the “sign and instrument” of the full realization of the unity yet to come.

776 As sacrament, the Church is Christ’s instrument... The Church “is the visible plan of God’s love for humanity,” because God desires “that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.”