

## Who is the Catholic Church?

The Church is a “who,” not a “what.”

How do you see the Church?

The mystical Body of Christ. What does it mean?

Two dimensions – **Petrine and Marian**

The Petrine: the hierarchical structure with the apostolic role of Peter, the Apostles and their successors.

The Petrine role is to teach, sanctify, and govern.

The greater is the Marian dimension. The Marian dimension precedes the Petrine dimension.

The Petrine dimension is oriented toward and at the service of the Marian dimension.

**The Marian dimension is the very reason why the Church exists: To correspond with love to God's infinite love.**

It is called "Marian" because Mary, with her total FIAT, is the prototype of such love response. To be "the prototype" means that Mary is the first finished model of what all Christians should become.

Before bishops were placed into office, the whole Church was present in Mary".

Mary is the Arc of the Covenant.

Mary was so full of grace that she became pregnant with God.

Just as Mary lived intimately united to the Trinity, we too are called to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit so that Christ is born in us and directs us to live in faithful love and obedience to the Father.

**This Marian total surrender of love to God is the essence of holiness.**

All dimensions of the Church, all structures and institutions, including the hierarchy are totally ordered to foster this holiness in her members.

Mary is the point of reference. Where the Marian principle is central there is an authentic presence of the Church.

What can be said of the Church can be said of Mary, what can be said of Mary can be said of the Church.

In the words of the Catechism:

"[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."

Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church's mystery as "the bride without spot or wrinkle." (*Eph 5:27*). **This is why the "Marian" dimension of the Church precedes the "Petrine."** CCC 773

The ordained are called to a life of service. Servant leadership.

St. Augustine: "Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian."

He ends with the words, "... I will find pleasure not so much in being in charge of you as in being of use to you."

Vatican II – The sincere gift of self.

In the hierarchy of holiness it is precisely the "woman", Mary of Nazareth, who is the "figure" of the Church.

According to the constant content of Sacred Tradition, the mystery and reality of the Church cannot be reduced to the hierarchical structure, the liturgy, the sacraments, and juridical ordinances. In fact, the intimate nature of the Church and the origin of its sanctifying efficacy must be found first in a mystical union with Christ.

This is of fundamental importance for understanding the Church in her own essence, so as to avoid applying to the Church - even in her dimension as an "institution" made up of human beings and forming part of history - criteria of understanding and judgment which do not pertain to her nature.

**The Petrine aspect of the Church is included in that Marian aspect.**

In Mary, the Immaculate, we find the essence of the Church without distortion. We must learn from her so that we too may be able, in St. Paul's words, to present ourselves "blameless" in the sight of the Lord, as he wanted us from the very beginning (cf. Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 1:4).

In the nascent Church Peter recognized Mary as the mother given to all in the Church by Christ at the cross; the first and most perfect model of faith and love. Mary, in her part, recognized and honored Peter and the Apostles as the ones who received from Christ the grace of ordination to make Him present in the sacraments, to teach and govern the Church.

Since the beginning Peter was recognized as the principle of unity and the presider in charity.

Both the Petrine and Marian dimensions from Christ. If we forget the Petrine dimension we fall into error and division; if we forget the Marian dimension we abandon love.

Mary is Queen of the Apostles without any pretensions to apostolic powers: she has other and greater powers.

**The greatest gift of God to the Church is her spousal union with Christ the groom.** This union, which is the essence of Christian identity, is already fulfilled in the union of Christ and Mary.

### **The Marian principle and the cross**

We offer our lives as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rm 12:1).

We too must be crucified with the Groom: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20).

Every Christian is called to offer his life, his suffering, the suffering of others, uniting them to Jesus at the cross because "all are called to respond - as a bride - with the gift of their lives to the inexpressible gift of the love of Christ" (J.P. II)

### **Summary**

The Petrine dimension of the Church could be succinctly expressed as the service of St. Peter and his successors orientated to the building up and maintaining of the Church's life of faith, the living of the Christian life in communion and charity, and the unity of the Church.

The Marian dimension of the Church is:

- Christological – Mary orientates the gaze of the Christian always towards her Son.
- Pneumatological – Mary expresses her openness to and the welcoming of the Holy Spirit from the Annunciation to Pentecost.
- Ecclesiological - Mary is the virgin made Church – made so by Jesus on the cross. John, representing the community of disciples, is called to accept Mary, and the Church, as a Mother.
- Anthropological – Mary is the model of discipleship. Mary cooperates in a fully human way with God's offer of salvation to humanity.

The Marian dimension forms the necessary foundation of love without which the Petrine dimension of the Church would be frustrated and limited in its fruitfulness.