

# God's Story, Our Story

## Lesson 29: Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth

### The Catholic Church and God's Plan for You



Jn 10 :10

Jn 14:18, Jn 15:26  
Mt 10:40, 18:18,  
28:18-20, Jn 20:21

Mt 5:14, 16:18

Ex 24:3, Lev 11:44, Ex  
34:10, Ex 29:9  
1 Ki 8:2, 1 Ki 8:10, 1 Ki  
8:41-43, 1 Ki 8 :25

CCC 813-16, Jude 3,  
Phil 2 :2

CCC 823-29, Jn 6 :70,  
Mt 7 :21-23

CCC 830-38, Mt 28 :19,  
Rev 5 :9

CCC 857-65, 2 Tim  
2 :2, Eph 2 :19-20

Jn 16 :13, 1 Tim 3 :15

CCC 74-100

CCC 101-141, DV 11  
2 Tim 3 :16, 2 Pet  
1 :20

1. The purpose of our life: to know God, to love him, and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next. Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin and hell, and to give us eternal life. When he saves us, he makes us part of his Body, the Church.
2. Jesus promised he would not leave us orphans but would send the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us. He gave the apostles his own authority and sent them out to continue his work: "*He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me*" (Lk 10:16).
3. The Church is a *visible* organization that will never be destroyed and will never fall away from Christ until his return. It is the only universal Christian Church that has existed since the time of Jesus and the largest Church in the world (a billion members).
4. The four marks of the Church: the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These marks were already prefigured in the people of Israel at the time of Moses and David.
5. **One:** Jesus established *one* Church (not many denominations), which teaches *one* set of doctrines, united by her source (the Trinity), her founder (Christ), her "soul" (the Holy Spirit), her bonds of communion (faith, worship, bishops in union with pope).
6. **Holy:** By his grace Jesus makes the Church holy, as he is holy. This doesn't mean that each member is always holy (Jesus said there would be good and bad members in the Church). The Church is the source of holiness especially through the sacraments.
7. **Catholic:** Jesus' Church is his gift to all people and it is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages.
8. **Apostolic:** Jesus appointed the apostles to be the Church's first leaders; their successors are the bishops. Since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of Catholic bishops faithfully handing on what the apostles taught.
9. God guided the Israelites on their escape from Egypt with a pillar of fire. Today he guides us through his Catholic Church.
10. God has always spoken to His people through the triple office of priest, prophet and king. Today He speaks to us through:
  - a. The Sacred Scriptures (prophetic) and its inerrant canon;
  - b. Sacred Tradition (priestly) and its efficacious sacraments;
  - c. The Magisterium (kingly) and its infallible teaching.
11. The **Sacred Scriptures:** The Old and New Testaments are inspired by God and teach firmly, faithfully and without error the truth which God wanted to communicate to us. The "Bible alone" theory is unscriptural and a recent "tradition of men" which has resulted in thousands of competing denominations.

2 Thess 2 :15, 1 Cor  
11 :2

Jn 16 :13

Mt 16 :18-19, Lk  
22 :31-32, Jn 21 :15-  
17, Acts 2 :1-41,  
15 :7-12

Jn 2 :1-11, Jn 6 :5-13,  
Jn 9 :1-7, Mt 26 :26-28

CCC 1213-1284  
Jn 3 :5, Tit 3 :5, 1 Pet  
3 :21, Acts 2 :38

CCC 1285-1321  
Acts 8 :15-17

CCC 1322-1419  
Jn 1 :29, 6 :53, Mk  
14 :22-24, 1 Cor  
11 :27-29

CCC 1422-1498  
Jn 20 :22-23  
2 Cor 5 :18-20

CCC 1499-1532  
Js 5 :14-15

CCC 1601-1666  
Mk 10 :7-9, Eph 5 :25

CCC 1537-1600  
Ex 19 :6, 19 :22  
1 Pet 2 :9  
Rom 15 :15-16

12. **Sacred Tradition:** Not traditions of men (customs or disciplines), but the teachings of Jesus and the apostles as passed down to us through the Church. The Bible and sacred Tradition are not different revelations, but two ways that the Church hands on the gospel. Sacred Tradition is most faithfully seen in the liturgy of the Church.
13. **The Magisterium:** Together the pope and the bishops form the teaching authority of the Church. Guided and protected from error by the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised, it gives us certainty in matters of doctrine and in interpreting the Bible.
14. **The Papacy:** Jesus chose Peter to be the rock on which he would build his the Church. Peter led the Church in proclaiming the gospel and making decisions. The bishop of Rome, the pope, is the successor of St. Peter and chief shepherd of the Church.
15. Jesus gave us the **seven sacraments** to heal, feed, and strengthen us. They are not just symbols, but material signs that convey God’s grace and love, just as Jesus healed, fed, and strengthened people through mud, water, bread, oil, and wine.
  - a. **Baptism:** Because of original sin, fellowship with God is broken. Through baptism we are born again spiritually, baptized into Christ’s death to share in his Resurrection. Baptism cleanses us of sins and brings the Holy Spirit into our souls. It is the gateway into the Church.
  - b. **Confirmation:** God strengthens our soul through the sacrament of confirmation so that we can meet the spiritual challenges in our life, just as the Holy Spirit came on the disciples at Pentecost to strengthen them with new graces to carry out Christ’s mission.
  - c. **The Eucharist:** Jesus feeds us with his own body and blood through the Eucharist. He is the “Lamb of God” who takes away the sins of the world and whom we must eat. At Mass, the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus.
  - d. **Confession:** When we stumble and fall into sin, God restores us to fellowship with him. Jesus gave his apostles power to forgive sins and reconcile us with the Father. Through confession to a priest, we have our sins forgiven and we receive God’s grace to help us resist future temptations.
  - e. **Anointing of the Sick:** Priests care for us when we are physically ill. The anointing of the sick helps us endure illness, cleanses our souls and helps us prepare to meet God.
  - f. **Matrimony:** In marriage God gives special graces to couples with life’s difficulties, especially to help them raise their children as loving followers of Christ. Marriage is permanent: only death can break it. It is a living symbol of the unbreakable relationship between Christ and his Church.
  - g. **Holy Orders:** Jesus calls certain men to a special priestly ministry. Priests are ordained and empowered to serve the Church as pastors, teachers, and spiritual fathers who heal, feed and strengthen God’s people – especially through preaching and the administration of the sacraments.

CCC 946-962  
1 Tim 2 :1-4, Rev 5 :8

CCC 487-511, 963-975  
Lk 1 :28, 1 :48,  
Rev 11 :19 – 12 :2

Jas 2:24, Gal 6:6-10  
Lk 6 :46, Rom 2 :6-7

Rom 11 :22, 1 Cor  
6 :9-12, Phil 2 :12

16. The **Communion of Saints**: Through prayer we grow in our relationship with Christ and with members of God's family on earth, in heaven, or in purgatory. Death has no power to separate us from Christ. Christians in heaven love us and pray for us more intensely than they could while on earth, and so we can ask them for their prayers.
17. God gave **Mary** a special role. He saved her from all sin, made her uniquely blessed among all women, and made her a model for all Christians. She is the mother of the Church - our mother. At the end of her life He took her into heaven – an image of our own resurrection at the end of the world.
18. How are we saved? Eternal life is God's free gift. We are saved by grace alone, but not by faith alone. We cannot "earn" heaven, but we should live out our faith by obeying God's commandments and doing acts of love.
19. Christians do not have an absolute guarantee of heaven. By sinning gravely, we can throw away God's gift of salvation. We can stay free from sin by embracing regular prayer, the sacraments, and performing charitable acts.
20. Incomplete Christianity is not enough. God wants everyone to receive the fullness of salvation that he has provided in the Church.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What is unique about the Catholic Church that cannot be found in other Christian denominations?
2. Explain the four marks of the Church. Why are they important? How were they prefigured under the Mosaic and Davidic covenants?
3. What is apostolic succession? Why is it important?
4. What is the role of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, and their relationship between one another? How were these prefigured in the OT?
5. Is the role of the pope really so important? What special gift did Peter receive from Jesus?
6. What is the role of the seven sacraments? Why are they so important?
7. Why is the Catholic priesthood important? Can we not do without it since all Christians are "a kingdom of priests"?
8. The Catholic Church teaches that she is "necessary for salvation." What do you think about this statement?
9. What is special about the Catholic concept of the communion of saints and about Mary's role in God's plan of salvation? Why do many non-Catholics have a problem with this teaching?
10. If the Catholic Church has the fullness of the means of salvation, why don't all people want to join her?

