

Does the Church possess the Teaching Authority of Jesus?

*And must one adhere to Church Teaching
in order to worthily receive the Eucharist?*

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The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, referencing Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, no. 25, affirms:

“To hear the voice of the Church, on matters of faith and morals, is to hear the voice of Christ himself.”

Let's first look at how God worked in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God established the authority and leadership of Moses, and dealt severely with those who rebelled against him.

God had established Moses as the leader of his people but some, led by Korah, who were jealous of his leadership, rose up with a large group of the leaders of the people to challenge the leadership of Moses. Here is what they said to him:

"You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" Numbers 16: 1-3

God then intervened directly to destroy those who rose up against Moses, his appointed leader. This story is also recounted in Psalm 106: 16-18. This event is referred to as "Korah's rebellion" in the New Testament (Jude 1:11).

Now let us look at the Scriptural foundation for the Church's claim to teach with the authority of Christ:

Jesus' teaching brings deliverance and healing. He taught with authority.

Jesus cast out an evil spirit who manifested itself in reaction to his teaching. As a result of seeing this, *"All were amazed and asked one another, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.'"* Upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus then cured their sick. (See Mark 1:21-34)

Jesus commissioned the Apostles in his own authority to continue his mission of healing and deliverance. They have a divine mandate to teach in his name – to teach with authority, as Jesus did.

And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons... Mark 3:14-15

The King James Version of the Bible uses the word "ordained" instead of "appointed" in the above verse.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you... I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and earth, has promised to remain with the Apostles he has sent.

If we wish to do the work of God, we must believe not only in Jesus but in those he has sent to us.

“They said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’” John 6:28-29

The obvious meaning of this passage is that we must believe in Jesus who was sent to us by God. But, since we believe that Jesus is also God, we must also believe in those that Jesus has sent. Jesus, as God, sent the Apostles as he was sent by his Father. When Scripture says we must believe in the one sent by God, it also must mean that we are to believe in the Apostles, who were also sent by God (Jesus).

Jesus sent the Apostles with divine authority and power, as he was sent by the Father. He entrusted his divine mission to them.

Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. John 17: 17-19

Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’ John 20:21-23

The power to forgive sin signifies divine authority. Only God can forgive sin.

And when he (Jesus) saw their faith he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” Luke 5:20-21 (Cf. Matthew 2:7)

Jesus gave the Apostles judicial power (binding and loosing) over heaven and earth. He entrusted his Kingdom (the Church) to them.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mt 18:18

I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke 22: 29-30

The Apostles speak with the voice of the Holy Spirit.

A Church council decision on issues concerning the faith is proclaimed as a decision of the Holy Spirit. The council of Jerusalem in 50 AD is related in Acts 15:6-31:

When they pronounced their decision, it was pronounced as the decision of the Holy Spirit (not of fallible men).

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. Acts 15:28

Christ teaches through those he commissioned to teach. To hear the teaching of the Apostles is to hear the voice of Christ himself.

He who hears you hears me. Luke 10:16

Those who reject the Apostles' teaching, reject Christ and God the Father.

He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me. Luke 10:16

The Early Church devoted itself to the teaching of the Apostles.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching... Acts 2:42

Jesus appointed Paul as an Apostle to preach and to teach.

(See Acts 26:16-17; 1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11)

St. Paul exhorts Christians to hold fast to the Apostles' teachings whether handed down orally or in writing (there was no New Testament at this point, just letters).

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 (also see Acts 15:27)

One of the reasons for the grace of apostleship was to bring all people to the "obedience of faith." Those who are "called to belong to Jesus Christ," are called to obedience to the teaching of his Apostles.

Through Jesus, Paul was "called to be an apostle." The Apostles "received grace and apostleship (from Jesus) to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Romans 1:1-6

The Lord himself gave Paul authority for the building up of the Church.

(See 2 Corinthians 10:8; 2 Corinthians 13:10)

Paul appointed (ordained) presbyters (priests).

They had appointed presbyters for them in each church. Acts 14:23

Paul appointed Titus bishop, with authority over the local church.

Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:15

He told Titus to appoint (ordain) presbyters in every town.

I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint presbyters in every town as I directed you. Titus 1:5

The first chapter of Jude explains how we must “contend for the faith” against those who “reject authority.” Jude 1: 3-8

Those who reject the authority established by the Apostles are like the men of Korah’s rebellion (Jude 1:11) who rejected the authority of Moses and were destroyed by God (see Numbers 16).

“These men revile whatever they do not understand.” Jude 1: 10

It is these who set up divisions... But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith... And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire... Jude 1: 19-23

The Apostle Paul refers to those who create dissention in the Church by teaching contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ as “bereft of the truth.”

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth. 1 Timothy 6: 3-5

There is a “standard of teaching,” we must commit to and obey.

Thanks be to God, that you... have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed. Romans 6:17

We hold fast to this correct teaching so that we might be saved.

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16

St. Paul explains that those who dissent from Church teaching do not serve Christ and should be avoided.

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ... Romans 16: 17-18

Paul describes dissention from Church teaching as serious sin. He plainly says that those who create dissension in the Church oppose the Spirit and he groups them among those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

The works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit (factions), envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5: 19-21

Paul had been entrusted to preserve the *sound doctrine* of the Church. Today, we refer to this as the *Deposit of Faith*. He passed on this responsibility and this “commission” to Timothy.

(Avoid)...whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted... This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son... wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith. 1 Timothy 1:10-11, 18-19

There are many who claim to teach the Word of God. Some are merely “peddlers” of the Word, while others have been commissioned by God.

Bishops (the Apostle Paul and Timothy in this example) who teach in union with the office of Peter (see Galatians 2: 1-2) *“are the aroma of Christ... among those who are being saved... not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 2: 15, 17)

Since the beginning, some in the Church, who have no teaching mandate from the Church, have stirred up trouble with their distorted teachings.

We have heard that some of our number (who went out) without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind. Acts 15: 24

“Many deceivers have gone out into the world... Look to yourselves that you do not lose what we worked for... Anyone who is so ‘progressive’ as not to remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God; whoever remains in the teaching has the Father and the Son.” 2 John 7-9

We must remain steady in sound teaching even when others do not. Don't settle for just any teacher who tells you what you want to hear.

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady... 2 Timothy 4:3

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. Hebrews 13:9

The Church preserves sound doctrine. As the household of God, it is the pillar and bulwark of truth.

The household of God... is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. 1Timothy 3:15

We must listen to the Church Christ established and follow its doctrine or risk being excluded from it.

If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:17

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him in your house or even greet him." 2 John 10

This begs the question: "Who speaks for the Church?"

Jesus told the Apostles that they did. They were the ones he "sent" to preach the Gospel. Jesus told them: "*He who hears you hears me.*" Luke 10:16 The Apostles then, appointed others to succeed them and to continue the mission of the Church that had been entrusted to them by Christ. Those appointed by the apostles then, speak for the Church.

Some call themselves "apostles" of the true faith, or "prophets," but are not. We should not tolerate them for they are imposters.

I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate the wicked; you have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and discovered that they are impostors. Revelation 2:2

Yet I hold this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who teaches and misleads my servants... Revelation 2:20 (also see Revelation 2:6 and 2:14).

The wisdom of God is made known through the Church.

That through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known... according to the eternal purpose... realized in Christ... Ephesians 3: 9-10

The Church has a visible, hierarchical structure, a “sacred order” which is appointed not by men but by God himself.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers... 1 Corinthians 12:28

Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Hebrews 13:10

The scriptural instruction to “obey your leader” has no meaning unless there is a way to determine who these leaders are that speak with the authority of the Church and of Christ. A precedent for the succession of the “office” or “ministry” of the Apostles is given in Acts 1:15-26 where Peter says that Judas’ office needed to be filled.

For it is written ... ‘His office let another take.’ Acts 1:20

The lot fell on Matthias and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles. Acts 1:26

Those ordained by an Apostle to serve the Church, have their authority not from men but from the Holy Spirit to shepherd God’s flock and protect them from the wolves who teach falsehood and draw away the disciples.

The words “elders (presbyters) of the church” and “overseers (bishops) of the flock” refers to the ordained leaders of the Church.

And from Mile'tus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (presbyters) of the church. Acts 20:17

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishops), to care for the church of God... wolves will come in among you... speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert. Acts 20: 28-31

Some people seek to be teachers but wander away from the true faith.

Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions... 1 Timothy 1: 6-7

Paul's authority as an Apostle came from God. He appointed (ordained) Timothy as bishop and, in doing so, entrusted him to defend the standard of true doctrine.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God... to Timothy, my true child in the faith... remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine... rather than the divine training that is in faith. 1 Timothy 1: 1-3

Even St. Paul made sure that the doctrine he taught was in full communion with the *standard* of the Apostle's teaching that is preserved in the appointed leaders of the Church.

I (Paul) went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me... and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. Galatians 2: 1-2

This account reflects the principle that true doctrine must be in union with the office of Peter. Today we speak of those bishops who teach in union with the Pope.

Jesus used the imagery of a "steward" as one whom the Master sets over his house to govern it.

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?" Luke 12: 42

St. Paul uses the imagery of a "steward" to speak of the ordained ministry.

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. Ephesians 3:2

A bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain. Titus 1:7

The Hierarchical structure of the Church preserves the "unity of faith."

His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no

longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.
Ephesians 4: 11-14

Jesus built his Church on Peter and promised it would last forever. It is Christ himself who is the one who builds and who guarantees the work.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

It was to Peter alone that Jesus entrusted the keys of his Kingdom.

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19

The image of the “keys to the kingdom” refers back to the Old Testament office of the steward who was placed over the whole household (a kind of *prime minister*):

On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open. Isaiah 22:19-25

By using the same language, Jesus is clearly establishing Peter in an office of authority (like a Prime Minister) in His Church. Revelation 3:7 shows that the one who holds the key of David has the power to speak in the name of Christ.

Christ gave to Peter and no one else the keys to the kingdom of heaven. It is the office of Peter that preserves the authoritative voice of Christ in the Church today. It is the Pope and those bishops (in direct line of succession from the Apostles) who remain in union with the successor of Peter (the Pope) who preserve the deposit of faith, the standard of true doctrine that is found in the Roman Catholic Church. This pattern that is found in Scripture has continued on from the time of the Apostles as can be seen from the following testimony of the early years of the Church.

How was Christ’s authority exercised in the early Church?

St. Clement of Rome lived during the Apostolic age and was ordained by St. Peter. Later he became the third successor of St. Peter as Pope. This would make him the fourth Pope. He is also revered as a martyr for the faith. Some

hold that St. Clement was the companion of St. Paul that is mentioned in Philippians 4:3. St. Irenaeus states that Clement remembered the Apostles. Pope St. Clement's letter to the church in Corinth is dated to either **80 or 96 A.D.** The background for this letter is explained by the Catholic Encyclopedia:

The Church of Corinth had been led by a few violent spirits into sedition against its rulers. No appeal seems to have been made to Rome, but a letter was sent in the name of the Church of Rome by St. Clement to restore peace and unity.

In this letter he describes those who were validly ordained as bishops and deacons by the Apostles, according to the will of God.

The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ ... Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.

Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Chapter XLII

He states that it was the Apostles themselves, on the authority of Christ, who established that there should be men appointed to succeed them.

Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect knowledge, they appoint those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.

Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Chapter XLIV

St. Ignatius of Antioch also lived during the time of the Apostles. He was a disciple of Sts. Peter and Paul and of St. John the Evangelist. St. Chrysostom tells us that St. Peter appointed him as the third bishop of Antioch where he was bishop for forty years before his martyrdom. (St. Peter himself was the first Bishop of Antioch.) In the year 110, while being lead in chains to his martyrdom in Rome, he wrote 7 letters to the churches he passed. These writings are important because they describe the three ranks of bishop, priest and deacon in the early Church. He stresses the importance of the role of the bishop as well as belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In his writings Ignatius

urged the Christian communities to remain faithful to their bishops, because this was essential to preventing heresy and division, and to keeping the house, the Church, standing strong.

"Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest" (Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1 [A.D. 110]).

"As sons of the light of truth, flee divisions and evil doctrines; where your shepherd is, follow him as his flock. For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop; all who repent and return to the unity of the Church will also belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ." (Letter to the Philadelphians [A.D. 110])

"Your submission to your bishop, who is in the place of Jesus Christ, shows me that you are not living as men usually do but in the manner of Jesus himself, who died for us that you might escape death by belief in his death. Thus one thing is necessary, and you already observe it, that you do nothing without your bishop; indeed, be subject to the clergy as well, seeing in them the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, for if we live in him we shall be found in him... And so I strongly urge you, not I so much as the love of Jesus Christ, to be nourished exclusively on Christian fare, abstaining from the alien food that is heresy. And this you will do if you are neither arrogant nor cut off from God, from Jesus Christ, and from the bishop and the teachings of the apostles... That is to say, whoever acts apart from the bishop and the clergy and the deacons is not pure in his conscience." (Letter to the Trallians [A.D. 110])

St. Irenaeus, when he was young, saw and heard St. Polycarp (a disciple of St. John). He became Bishop of Lyons and wrote the following in **A.D. 189**.

It is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever... For all these have fallen from the truth. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 4:26:2

The true knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession of bishops,

by which succession the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere. Iraneaus, *Against Heresies*, 4:33:8

The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She [the church] also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul.... For the churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different nor do those in Spain nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East nor those in Egypt nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world. Iraneaus. *Against heresies* book 1, 10, 2

St. Augustine:

The Catholic Church is the work of Divine Providence, achieved through the prophecies of the prophets, through the Incarnation and the teaching of Christ, through the journeys of the Apostles, through the suffering, the crosses, the blood and the death of the martyrs, through the admirable lives of the saints. When, then, we see so much help on God's part, so much progress and so much fruit, shall we hesitate to bury ourselves in the bosom of that Church? For starting from the Apostolic Chair down through successions of bishops, even unto the open confession of all mankind, it has possessed the crown of teaching authority. Augustine of Hippo, *The Advantage of Believing*, 4th century A.D.

Where do we find the true Eucharist?

Some say that they go to the church where they feel they will be “fed.” Some may be disappointed that the preaching in this or that Catholic Church is not more “dynamic.” While it is important to be fed with the Word of God, there is another “food” which God also desires for us. Jesus attaches central importance to the Eucharist, explaining that he is the Bread which came down from heaven. The Eucharist is the *Word made flesh* that gives life to the world.

For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world. John 6:33

Jesus said to them, “*I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.*” John 6:35

If we reject the Eucharist, Jesus says we will have no life in us.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. John 6:53

St. Ignatius of Antioch lived during the Apostolic age. He is described as a disciple of St. John the Evangelist and was appointed by St. Peter as the third bishop of Antioch. St. Peter himself was the first Bishop of Antioch. Around **110 AD**, while being lead to his martyrdom, he wrote:

But avoid divisions, as being the beginning of evils. Do ye all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ doth the Father; and follow the presbyters as the apostles; and have respect unto the deacons as unto the commandment of God. Let no one, apart from the bishop, do any of the things that appertain unto the church. Let that eucharist alone be considered valid which is celebrated in the presence of the bishop, or of him to whom he shall have entrusted it. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Smyrnaeans*, 8:1

Wherever the bishop appear, there let the multitude be; even as wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful either to baptize, or to hold a love-feast without the consent of the bishop; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that also is well pleasing unto God, to the end that whatever is done may be safe and sure. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8:2.

What does the Church teach about the Relationship of Faith and the Eucharist (Holy Communion)?

The relationship between our faith in the *body of teachings* in the Church and our faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in his *Body and Blood* in the Eucharist is that they are the *same Body*. We believe Jesus is truly present in both the teachings of the Church and in the Eucharist. Jesus told his Apostles: “He who hears you, hears me.” (Lk 10:16) In order to partake of Our Lord in the Word made flesh we must first partake of him in the Word as he communicates himself to us through the teachings of the Church. Jesus communicates himself to us first in his teachings so that we may commune with him in his Body. This is why the Liturgy of the Word precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We partake of the same Word in both. Jesus comes to us as the Word of God through both the Teaching Office of the Church and the Sacramental (Sanctifying) Office of the Church. We receive the Word of God in the teachings of the Church and in the Eucharist, the Word made flesh. The Word of Life and the Bread of Life are the same reality. This is why we must be in full communion with the Teaching Office of the Church as believers in order to partake of Holy Communion. Just as we would never consume only part of the Host and spit out the rest, we may not pick and choose which teachings of the Church we will allow to nourish our lives and which we will reject – and still consider ourselves to be practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church.

If we can't *swallow* the whole truth of all the teachings of the Church, we should not go through the motion of consuming the Host, which is this same Truth incarnate in the flesh. To reject any definitive teaching of the Church on faith and morals and then continue to receive Holy Communion is the equivalent of receiving the Host into your mouth and then spitting out a part of it that you do not like.

In the middle of the second century (around 155 A.D.) Saint Justin Martyr wrote:

No one may share the Eucharist with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ. Justin Martyr, First Apology

One may choose to believe differently than the Catholic Church, but it is only the Catholic Church, and no one else, who has been entrusted with the power to safeguard what, constitutes true *Catholic* belief. In defining Catholic belief, the Church merely passes on the truths given to her by Christ. We call these truths the *Deposit of Faith*. In order to be in full communion with the Catholic Church, one must accept those teachings that the Catholic Church determines are necessary in order to be in full communion with her. While the Church respects other Christians who are not in full communion with her teachings, she only offers Holy Communion to her faithful members who fully adhere to her teachings – to those who are in *full communion* with her teaching.

The Church is thus the custodian and steward of both the mysteries of Faith and the mysteries of the Sacraments. These form a unity – a *Holy Communion*. "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." (Mt 19:6) Christ established the Church with authority in three basic areas: Pastoral (King or Shepherd), Teaching (Prophet), and Sanctifying or Sacramental (Priest). This represents the three aspects of Jesus' mission as priest, prophet and king. Jesus passed on his mission to the Church to govern, teach and celebrate the Sacraments.

In order to be in full communion with the Church and the mission given to her by Jesus, we must be in full communion with all three of these areas (sacramental, pastoral and teaching). We cannot say that we are in full communion with the Church sacramentally if we are not in full communion with her teachings. To be in full communion with her teachings means we accept all the teachings of the Church on faith and morals. Unfortunately, we have too often accepted the mentality that we can pick and choose what we may believe of our faith. This is not so. Our response of faith must be *complete*. This is

what we call “the obedience of faith.” Even if we do not understand a particular teaching of the Church, we must trust the Holy Spirit guides the Church and will not let it teach error. Cardinal Ratzinger quotes St. Paul to explain why this is important:

Faith is obedience “from the heart to the form of doctrine into which you were handed over” (Rom 6:17)... The Apostle says that a “form of doctrine” is an essential component of faith. We do not think up faith on our own. It does not come from us as an idea of ours but to us as a word from outside... We are “handed over” into this Word that reveals new paths to our reason and gives form to our life.¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that:

The Church's faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith received from the apostles. (CCC) 1124

The Church, ‘the pillar and bulwark of the truth’ (1Tim 3:15), faithfully guards ‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3). She guards the memory of Christ's words; it is she who from generation to generation hands on the apostles' confession of faith. As a mother who teaches her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith. CCC 171

One who is not able to accept all of the teachings of the Church on faith and morals would be in a position of not being in *full communion* with the Church. For this reason, it would be dishonest for a person who is not in full communion with the Church to receive Holy Communion. Reception of Holy Communion is a sign of full communion with *both* the real presence of Jesus in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, *and* with His *mystical* Body (the Church). That is why we are unable to invite our Protestant brothers and sisters to partake of Holy Communion at our Liturgy. They may have a stronger *personal* faith in Jesus than many of the Catholics who come to receive Holy Communion, but their faith is not in *full communion* with the Catholic Church. Thus, it would be a false sign of unity for them to receive. Pope Benedict has explained it this way:

In the Eucharist I can never demand communion with Jesus alone. He has given himself a Body. Whoever receives him in Communion necessarily

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997) 29.

*communicates with all his brothers and sisters who have become members of the one Body.*²

Reception of Holy Communion is thus a sign of communion with the Church – with her teachings, Sacraments, and the Pope. This is why our Orthodox brothers and sisters, who have valid Sacraments and share our doctrines, do not normally partake of Holy Communion with us at Mass. They are not in *full communion* with the Roman Catholic Church because they are not in full communion with the Pope.

Canon law was updated in 1998 to address the problem of Catholics who selectively dissent from certain Catholic doctrines. Canon 750.2 states:

Each and everything set forth definitively by the Magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held; namely, those things required for the holy keeping and faithful exposition of the deposit of faith; therefore, anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church.

In a *Commentary* released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to accompany this change in Canon law, Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) gave a further explanation of what this means:

Christ's promise to bestow the Holy Spirit, who "will guide you into all truth", constantly sustains the Church on her way. Assent (to these doctrines) is based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the magisterium.

Every believer, therefore, is required to give firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Church's magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the magisterium in these matters. Whoever denies these truths would be in the position of rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine and would therefore no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church. (Commentary, June 29, 1998).

Cardinal Ratzinger said that this statement refers not only to the Church's teaching on not ordaining women (an example given in the *Commentary*), but also to "everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals." Simply put, a Catholic must accept all the teachings of the Catholic Church on faith and morals in order to remain in full communion with

² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius press, 1996), 82.

the Church (see Mat 28:20; Mat 18:17; Luke 10:16; Rom. 16:17; 1Tim 1:3-4; 1Titus 1:9; 1Tim 1:18-19;).

While some feel a *pastoral* approach might not worry about complete adherence to every doctrine, the Church explains that this is a mistake. What is *pastoral* can never be understood to be at odds with true doctrine.

*What is pastoral is not opposed to what is doctrinal. Nor can pastoral action rescind from doctrinal content, from which in fact it draws its substance and real validity. Now, if the Church is the "pillar and bulwark of the truth"[2Tim 3:15] and is placed in the world as Mother and Teacher, how could she neglect the task of teaching the truth which constitutes a path of life? Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, On Reconciliation and Penance (1984), 26.*

This is also not limited merely to the formal infallible (*ex cathedra*) proclamations, creeds and dogmas of the Church, as *Lumen Gentium*, par. 25 points out:

In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 892) echoes this affirmation:

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a "definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful "are to adhere to it with religious assent" which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it.

The Catechism (CCC 2087-2089) further explains how our obedience to the faith of the Church flows from our observance of the First Commandment.

Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us. St. Paul speaks of the "obedience of faith" as our first obligation. He shows that "ignorance of God" is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations. Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him.

The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. There are various ways of sinning against faith:

- ✠ *Voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.*
- ✠ *Involuntary doubt refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated doubt can lead to spiritual blindness.*
- ✠ *Incredulity is the neglect of revealed truth or the willful refusal to assent...*
- ✠ *"Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same;*
- ✠ *apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith;*
- ✠ *schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.*

Worthy Reception of Holy Communion – Who May Receive?

Simply put, we must commune with the faith of the Church before we commune with her Body. The Body of Christ and his Mystical Body, the Church are the same *Body*. Jesus, the Bridegroom, weds his Church and the Mass is a celebration of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb of God. This is the "one flesh union" toward which the Sacrament of Marriage points. The Sacrament of Matrimony is a sign that looks forward to and provides us grace to attain the Wedding Feast of Heaven. But we already celebrate this Feast on Earth and taste of its fruits in the Mass!

And just as wedding vows precede the marital embrace, the Profession of Faith (the Creed), precedes Holy Communion. In 2006, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a document that explains why "sharing in the Church's faith" is a condition for "full participation in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which culminates in the reception of Holy Communion." The Bishops remind us that in the Acts of the Apostles, the first Christians "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Only those therefore

who devote themselves to the “teachings of the Apostles” as handed down to us by the Church, are in a position to share in the “breaking of the bread.” The following excerpt from the Bishops addresses what to do when there is a “Lack of Adherence to Church Teaching:”

As Catholics we believe what the Church authoritatively teaches on matters of faith and morals, for to hear the voice of the Church, on matters of faith and morals, is to hear the voice of Christ himself.³ To give selective assent to the teachings of the Church not only deprives us of her life-giving message, but also seriously endangers our communion with her. Some Catholics may not fully understand the Church’s doctrinal and moral teaching on certain issues. They may have certain questions and even uncertainties. In these situations of honest doubt and confusion, they are welcome to partake of Holy Communion, as long as they are prayerfully and honestly striving to understand the truth of what the Church professes and are taking appropriate steps to resolve their confusion and doubt. Individuals who experience serious difficulties with or doubts about Church teaching should carefully study those Church teachings from authentic sources and seek advice from a confessor or pastor. If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain.⁴

³ Referring to the authority of the pope and bishops as authentic teachers of the faith, the declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* states that the faithful are not simply to listen to them as experts in Catholic doctrine, but “must accept their teaching given in Christ’s name, with an assent that is proportionate to the authority that they possess and that they mean to exercise” (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church Against Certain Errors of the Present Day [Mysterium Ecclesiae]*, no. 2, in *The Pope Speaks* 18:2 [1973], 148). Also see *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper:” *On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist* (2006).