

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH AND MARY: A CCC STUDY SHEET

SNAPSHOT OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY SECTIONS

The Mystery of the Church

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EXPANDED VERSION

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

CCC 766, 770, 772, 775-76, 780, 790, 795-96

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" (LG 3; cf. Jn 19:34). "For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the 'wondrous sacrament of the whole Church'" (SC 5). As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross (Cf. St. Ambrose, In Luc. 2,85-89:PL 15,1666-1668).

770 The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only "with the eyes of faith" (Roman Catechism I,10,20) that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life.

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" (Eph 1:10). St. Paul calls the nuptial union of Christ and the Church "a great mystery." Because she is united to Christ as to her bridegroom, she becomes a mystery in her turn (Eph 5:32; 3:9-11; 5:25-27). Contemplating this mystery in her, Paul exclaims: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

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."¹⁹⁷ 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" (Rev 7:9); 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. "She is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all," "the universal sacrament of salvation," by which Christ is "at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men" (LG 9 § 2, 48 § 2; GS 45 § 1.). 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" (Paul VI, June 22, 1973; AG 7 § 2; cf. LG 17).

780 The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men.

"One Body"

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."²²⁰ This is especially true of Baptism, which unites us to Christ's death and Resurrection, and the Eucharist, by which "really sharing in the body of the Lord, . . . we are taken up into communion with him and with one another."²²¹

The Church is the Bride of Christ

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. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist (Jn 3:29). The Lord referred to himself as the "bridegroom" (Mk 2:19). The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride "betrothed" to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him (Cf. Mt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 1 Cor 6:15-17; 2 Cor 11:2). The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb (Cf. Rev 22:17; Eph 1:4; 5:27). "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her." (Eph 5:25-26). He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body (Cf. Eph 5:29):

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 (*ex persona capitis*) and in his role as body (*ex persona corporis*). 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" (Eph 5:31-32). And the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt. 19:6). 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" (St. Augustine, *En. in Ps. 74*:4:PL 36,948-949).

FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH IS *ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC* CCC 811-12, 865

811 "This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (LG 8). These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other (Cf. DS 2888), indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.

812 Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these properties from her divine source. But their historical manifestations are signs that also speak clearly to human reason. As the First Vatican Council noted, the "Church herself, with her marvelous propagation, eminent holiness, and inexhaustible

fruitfulness in everything good, her catholic unity and invincible stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable witness of her divine mission" (Vatican Council I, De Filius 3:DS 3013).

ONE

CCC 813, 816-19

"The sacred mystery of the Church's unity" (UR 2)

813 The Church is one because of her source: "the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit" (UR 2 § 5). The Church is one because of her founder: for "the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, . . . restoring the unity of all in one people and one body" (GS 78 § 3). The Church is one because of her "soul": "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity" (UR 2 § 2). Unity is of the essence of the Church:

What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her "Church" (St. Clement Of Alexandria, Pæd. 1,6,42:PG 8,300).

816 "The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (LG 8 § 2).

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism explains: "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God" (UR 3 § 5).

HOLY

CCC 823, 825-27

823 "The Church . . . is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God" (LG 39; Cf. Eph 5:25-26). The Church, then, is "the holy People of God," (LG 12) and her members are called "saints" (Acts 9:13; 1 Cor 6:1; 16:1).

825 "The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect" (LG 48 § 3). In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired: "Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state - though each in his own way - are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect" (LG 11 § 3).

826 Charity is the soul of the holiness to which all are called: it "governs, shapes, and perfects all the means of sanctification" (LG 42).

"If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all; it must have a Heart, and a Heart BURNING WITH LOVE. And I realized that this love alone was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. LOVE, IN FACT, IS THE VOCATION WHICH INCLUDES ALL OTHERS; IT'S A UNIVERSE OF ITS OWN, COMPRISING ALL TIME AND SPACE - IT'S ETERNAL!" (St. Thérèse Of Lisieux, Autobiography of a Saint, tr. Ronald Knox (London: Harvill, 1958), p. 235).

827 "Christ, 'holy, innocent, and undefiled,' knew nothing of sin, but came only to expiate the sins of the people. The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" (LG 8 § 3; Cf. UR 3; 6; Heb 2:17; 726; 2 Cor 5:21). All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners (Cf. 1 Jn 1:8-10). In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time (Cf. Mt 13:24-30). Hence the Church gathers sinners already caught up in Christ's salvation but still on the way to holiness:

"The Church is therefore holy, though having sinners in her midst, because she herself has no other life but the life of grace. If they live her life, her members are sanctified; if they move away from her life, they fall into sins and disorders that prevent the radiation of her sanctity. This is why she suffers and does penance for those offenses, of which she has the power to free her children through the blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Paul VI, CPG § 19).

CATHOLIC

CCC 830-32, 34, 836-39, 841-44, 846-48

What does "catholic" mean?

830 The word "catholic" means "universal," in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole." The Church is catholic in a double sense:

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrn. 8,2:Apostolic Fathers,II/2,311). In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" (UR 3; AG 6; Eph 1:22-23) which he has willed: correct and complete confession of

faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost (cf. AG 4) and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.

831 Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race (Cf. Mt 28:19):

“All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one. . . . The character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods, under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit” (LG 13 §§ 1-2; cf. Jn 11:52).

Each particular Church is "catholic"

832 "The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament. . . . In them the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated. . . . In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present, through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is constituted" (LG 26).

834 Particular Churches are fully catholic through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome "which presides in charity" (St. Ignatius Of Antioch, *Ad Rom.* 1,1: Apostolic Fathers, II/2,192; cf. LG 13). "For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord" (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3,3,2:PG 7/1,849; Cf. Vatican Council I:DS 3057). Indeed, "from the incarnate Word's descent to us, all Christian churches everywhere have held and hold the great Church that is here [at Rome] to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Savior's promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her" (St. Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theo.*:PG 91:137-140).

Who belongs to the Catholic Church?

836 "All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God. . . . And to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation" (LG 13).

837 "Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the

Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' not 'in heart'" (LG 14).

838 "The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter" (LG 15). Those "who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church" (UR 3). With the Orthodox Churches, this communion is so profound "that it lacks little to attain the fullness that would permit a common celebration of the Lord's Eucharist" (Paul VI, *Discourse*, December 14, 1975; cf. UR 13-18).

The Church and non-Christians

839 "Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways" (LG 16).

The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People. When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People (Cf. NA 4), "the first to hear the Word of God" (Roman Missal, Good Friday 13:General Intercessions,VI). The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom 9:4-5), "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

841 The Church's relationship with the Muslims. "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day" (LG 16; cf. NA 3).

842 The Church's bond with non-Christian religions is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race:

All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city. . . (NA 1).

843 The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life" (LG 16; cf. NA 2; EN 53).

844 In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them:

Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair (LG 16; cf. Rom 1:21, 25).

845 To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood (St. Augustine, Sermon 96, 7, 9: PL 38, 588; St. Ambrose, De virg. 18: PL 16, 297B; cf. already 1 Pet 3:20-21).

"Outside the Church there is no salvation"

846 How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? (Cf. Cyprian, Ep. 73.21: PL 3, 1169; De unit.: PL 4, 509-536). Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

"Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it" (LG 14; cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5).

847 This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church:

"Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation" (LG 16; cf. DS 3866-3872).

848 "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men" (AG 7; cf. Heb 11:6; 1 Cor 9:16).

857 The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways:

- she was and remains built on "the foundation of the Apostles" (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself (Cf. Mt 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:7-8; Gal 1:1; etc.);
- with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching (Cf. Acts 2:42), the "good deposit," the salutary words she has heard from the apostles (Cf. 2 Tim 1:13-14);
- she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, "assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor" (AG 5):

You are the eternal Shepherd
 who never leaves his flock untended.
Through the apostles
 you watch over us and protect us always.
You made them shepherds of the flock
 to share in the work of your Son. . . .
(Roman Missal, *Preface of the Apostles I*).

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

CCC 946-48, 954, 956, 958

946 After confessing "the holy catholic Church," the Apostles' Creed adds "the communion of saints." In a certain sense this article is a further explanation of the preceding: "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?" (Nicetas, *Expl. Symb.*, 10:PL 52:871B). The communion of saints is the Church.

947 "Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others. . . . We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head. . . . Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Symb.*, 10). "As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund" (*Roman Catechism I*, 10, 24).

948 The term "communion of saints" therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion in holy things (*sancta*) and "among holy persons (*sancti*)."

Sancta sanctis! ("God's holy gifts for God's holy people") is proclaimed by the celebrant in most Eastern liturgies during the elevation of the holy Gifts before the distribution of communion. The

faithful (*sancti*) are fed by Christ's holy body and blood (*sancta*) to grow in the communion of the Holy Spirit (*koinonia*) and to communicate it to the world.

The Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth

954 The three states of the Church. "When the Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is'" (LG 49; cf. Mt 25:31; 1 Cor 15:26-27; Council of Florence (1439):DS 1305):

All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbors, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (LG 49; cf. Eph 4:16).

956 The intercession of the saints. "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. . . . They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped" (LG 49; cf. 1 Tim 2:5).

Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life (St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers).

I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth (St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Final Conversations*, tr. John Clarke (Washington: ICS, 1977), 102).

958 Communion with the dead. "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them" (LG 50; cf. 2 Macc 12:45). Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective.

In Brief

960 The Church is a "communion of saints": this expression refers first to the "holy things" (*sancta*), above all the Eucharist, by which "the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both represented and brought about" (LG 3).

961 The term "communion of saints" refers also to the communion of "holy persons" (*sancti*) in Christ who "died for all," so that what each one does or suffers in and for Christ bears fruit for all.

962 "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers" (Paul VI, CPG § 30).

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
CCC 487, 495

The Person of the Eternal Son is ... Born of the Virgin Mary

487 What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.

Mary's divine motherhood

495 Called in the Gospels "the mother of Jesus", Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as "the mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43; Jn 2:1; 19:25; cf. Mt 13:55; et al.). In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*) (Council of Ephesus (431): DS 251).

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
CCC 490-92

490 To become the mother of the Savior, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role" (LG 56). The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God (Lk 1:28), was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854): DS 2803).

492 The "splendor of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: she is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son" (LG 53, 56). The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and chose her "in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Cf. Eph 1:3-4).

VIRGINITY OF MARY

CCC 496-97, 499, 503

496 From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed" (Council of the Lateran (649): DS 503; cf. DS 10-64). The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century says:

"You are firmly convinced about our Lord, who is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin,. . . he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate. . . he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrn 1-2: Apostolic Fathers, ed. J. B. Lightfoot (London: Macmillan, 1889), II/2, 289-293; Sch 10, 154-156; cf. Rom 1:3; Jn 1:13).

497 The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility (Mt. 1:18-25; Lk 1:26-38): "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit", said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée (Mt 1:20). The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Isa 7:14 in the LXX, quoted in Mt 1:23 (Gk.)).

Mary - "ever-virgin"

499 The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man (Cf. DS 291; 294; 427; 442; 503; 571; 1880). In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it" (LG 57). And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the "Ever-virgin" (cf. LG 52).

503 Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures" (Council of Friuli (796): DS 619; cf. Lk 2:48-49).

MARY'S ROLE IN GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

506 Mary is a virgin because her virginity is the sign of her faith "unadulterated by any doubt", and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will (LG 63; cf. 1 Cor 7:34-35). It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Savior: "Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ" (St. Augustine, *De virg.*, 3: PL 40, 398).

507 At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: "the Church indeed. . . by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse" (LG 64; cf. 63).

In Brief

508 From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. "Full of grace", Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (SC 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

509 Mary is truly "Mother of God" since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.

510 Mary "remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin" (St. Augustine, *Serm.* 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38).

511 The Virgin Mary "cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation" (LG 56). She uttered her yes "in the name of all human nature" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.

**MARY, MOTHER OF CHRIST, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH
CCC 963, 966-68, 971-72**

Mary - Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church

963 Since the Virgin Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit has been treated, it is fitting now to consider her place in the mystery of the Church. "The Virgin Mary . . . is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. . . . She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' . . . since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who

are members of its head" (LG 53; cf. St. Augustine, *De virg.* 6:PL 40,399). "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church" (Paul VI, Discourse, November 21, 1964).

... also in her Assumption

966 "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death" (LG 59; cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950):DS 3903; cf. Rev 19:16). The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians:

In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death (Byzantine Liturgy, *Troparion*, Feast of the Dormition, August 15th).

... she is our Mother in the order of grace

967 By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a "preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (*typus*) (LG 53; 63) of the Church.

968 Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further. "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace" (LG 61).

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin

[Note: devotion is radically distinct from adoration!]

971 "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48): "The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship" (Paul VI, MC 56). The Church rightly honors "the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. . . . This very special devotion . . . differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration" (LG 66). The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an "epitome of the whole Gospel," express this devotion to the Virgin Mary (Cf. Paul VI, MC 42; SC 103).

Mary – Eschatological Icon of the Church

972 After speaking of the Church, her origin, mission, and destiny, we can find no better way to conclude than by looking to Mary. In her we contemplate what the Church already is in her mystery on her own "pilgrimage of faith," and what she will be in the homeland at the end of her journey. There, "in the glory

of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity," "in the communion of all the saints" (LG 69), the Church is awaited by the one she venerates as Mother of her Lord and as her own mother.

In the meantime the Mother of Jesus, in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God (LG 68; Cf. 2 Pet 3:10).