

The Church is Apostolic

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. ~ Ephesians 2:19-22

THE SALVATION of the human race is bound up with the apostles. In his own mysterious and loving plan, the Son of God called and appointed twelve men to enter a relationship with him that was altogether unique (see Mk 3:13-19). He lived and ate with them, listened to and consoled them, taught and admonished them. He trusted them with his very life and gave them a share in his own miraculous power. In this, he raised them to a level of intimacy with God that was not only unsurpassed, but could hardly be expressed or imagined. They found themselves lifted to the heights of divine friendship (see Jn 15:15) and became “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4). It was only fitting, therefore, that after accomplishing our salvation, Jesus entrusted to these men his own saving mission (see Mk 16:15) and granted them, for

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the sake of us all, a firm pledge of his own divine authority (see Mt 28:18-20; Jn 20:21-23). It is through them and their successors that the divine grace won for us by Jesus on the cross, and the fullness of his saving message, are communicated to the world.

A careful reading of the Gospels reveals that, for

Jesus, everything depended on the apostles. He himself wrote nothing down, and he often pulled the apostles aside to explain what was misunderstood or to reveal what he had hidden from the crowds and the other disciples. When they asked why he spoke to the people in parables, Jesus replied, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Mt 13:11).

Although anyone who fears God and does what is good is acceptable to him (see Acts 10:35),



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Pope John Paul II, reigning from 1978-2005, has been succeeded by Pope Benedict XVI, the 264th successor to the Apostle Peter

God wills to save us and make us holy as a “people” who are bonded and linked together in unity and charity. The calling of the Israelite race and God’s desire to make them his own attests to this. Nevertheless, Israel was called in *anticipation* of the redemption and a *new people* who would be gathered together from every tribe and nation. Together, in all the reality and power of Jesus’ death and Resurrection, they would become “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... who once were no people but now are God’s people*” (1 Pt 2:9-10).

This new “People of God” was destined to be gathered, governed, and sanctified by “*the twelve apostles of the Lamb*” (Rv 21:14). They knew that God was calling them to be “*ministers of a new covenant*” (2 Cor 3:6), “*servants of God*” (2 Cor 6:4), “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Cor 5:20), “*servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*” (1 Cor 4:1). They were sent to preach the Gospel that converts hearts, establish believers in communities of faith, and administer the sacraments that give the graces necessary for salvation. In short, they were called to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, namely, the Church. Thus, the one Church established by Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity is an *apostolic* Church. Apostolicity is essential to its authenticity. It is founded upon the apostles and built upon Peter, chosen from amongst them (see Lk 22:31-32; Jn 21:15-17), with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

Since our Lord intended to be with us until “*the close of the age*” (Mt 28:20), the apostles needed to



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A bishop's crozier, symbolizing his office of shepherd of Christ's flock

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mission. It is the task of every Christian to spread the Kingdom of Christ to all people.

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choose successors to themselves. We see this first in the Acts of the Apostles, when St. Peter initiates the selection of a successor to Judas the traitor (see Acts 1:15-26). St. Peter identifies this succession as one taking the “office” of Judas (see Acts 1:20). As the Church spread beyond Judea into the Gentile world, it became essential to appoint additional individuals to oversee the various local churches, as we read in St. Paul’s letters (see Phil 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1; Ti 1:7; the English word “bishop” derives from the Greek *episkopos*, which means “overseer”). And we learn also from St. Paul that, in his role as apostle, he had the power to appoint others to serve as priests: “*This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you*” (Ti 1:5). This transfer of authority occurs by the laying on of hands, as we read in the book of Acts (see Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3) and in St. Paul’s letter to his disciple, the bishop St. Timothy (see 2 Tm 1:6). It is the firm tradition of the Church that every bishop, every priest, and every deacon can trace his ministerial powers through the laying on of hands of a bishop who himself can trace his ordination directly to the apostles themselves.

The Church is also apostolic in the sense that, united to the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, the Church is sent out to convert the whole world. Hence, all members of the Church are called in various ways to fulfill the apostolic