

Every week when we recite the Creed, we proclaim:

*I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.*

These four adjectives together are called “*the Four Marks of the Church.*”

The word *Church* is a slippery one. It is used in so many different ways that even we may get confused as to just what it means.

We would say, “*I’m going to church,*” to mean we are going to Mass ... we might say, “*That’s my church,*” when we drive by this building to indicate our Parish ... people sometimes say, “*The Church says,*” this or that to indicate a teaching of the Catholic Church ... or perhaps if they disagree with a priest or a bishop or a pope, they might indicate that they “*disagree with the Church,*” on some topic or another.

Add to this that in *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* from the Second Vatican Council articles nine through seventeen address the Church as the people of God – that is, our own particular and individual role as “*the Church.*”

While all of this can be rather confusing, every week we recite that line:

*I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.*

Today is the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time. And in the Gospel of St. Mark, we encounter the beginnings of the Church. The Twelve Apostles are sent out two-by-two with little else than the clothes on their back and the sandals on their feet. Jesus sends them out in order to preach repentance, and to teach the message of the Gospel, and to heal the sick and free those possessed by demons.

Even 2,000-some years later, this remains the core mission of the Church ... in whatever meaning we apply to the word *church*.

In the short pericope from the Prophet Amos, we see the division among God’s chosen people ... with priest versus prophet ... prophet versus king ... and so on. Division among the ranks of any group is as old as human civilization itself.

And so, just how are we as “*Church*” supposed to be “*One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*” with all the personal, organizational, and cultural chaos that pervades the world ... and creeps into our personal and communal lives as “*Church*”?

Under our own power, it is all but impossible to experience unity, holiness, universality, and apostolicity in ourselves and with each other.

St. Paul shows us the key in the first chapter from the Letter to the Ephesians. St. Paul is sometimes considered by Bible Scholars to be the Master of the Run-On Sentence.

And in the two sentences we heard read today, St. Paul provides us with a mouthful of theology – a veritable feast of spiritual advice on how we are to remain “*One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*” in the midst of our daily lives in the world.

St. Paul outlines three levels of blessings that we have received: Blessings from God the Father, Blessings from God the Son, and Blessings from God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father has blessed us by choosing us, adopting us, and accepting us.

God the Son has blessed us by redeeming us, forgiving us, and revealing God’s will to us.

God the Holy Spirit has blessed us in that we have received the Holy Spirit as our spiritual inheritance, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and we have received the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in order to live out our Christian calling.

It is our task to cooperate with these blessings, and to allow the graces of these blessings to not only affect us, but to penetrate into the depths of our hearts, minds, and souls.

That is why we come together at the Mass. To receive the spiritual blessings poured out from this altar every time we gather to celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist. This is the role of the Sacraments in our lives. This is why we pray, read Scriptures, and serve those in need. Not for material gain but for our spiritual benefit.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray to be better attuned to the great gift we have received from Almighty God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May we set aside any obstacles that prevent us from receiving the spiritual blessings which are so generously poured out on us.

May we recognize in ourselves, in this community, and in the wider Christian community the presence of the Triune God ... so that we may truly be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church ... chosen, adopted, and accepted by God the Father; redeemed, forgiven, and enlightened by God the Son; and blessed, sealed, and gifted by God the Holy Spirit.