

# THE CHURCH IS ONE



Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower, He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you .... Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn.15:1-5). Jesus wants that those who believe in him shall be close to him as branches to a vine.

Jesus established the Church on the foundation of the apostles. Jesus wants that all those who are redeemed by his blood should remain one in this Church. Jesus who laid down his life to gather into one flock the scattered children of God, does not wish to sanctify and redeem people individually, cut off from others of the same faith. He **willed to make them into one people so that they might know him in truth and serve him in holiness.** (LG. 9). In the priestly prayer he offered, he prayed to his Father that just as he and his Father are one, those who believe in him should be one (Jn. 17:21). Jesus wants to unite us to his Father and the Holy Spirit. It is his wish that all people should join the fellowship. It is for this purpose that he established the Church. He says, “I have other sheep, that do not

belong to this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” (Jn. 10:16).

## **Church, the Fellowship of the Believers**

Fellowship was the distinguishing mark of those who responded to the preaching of the apostles in the early Church. They participated joyfully, in the preaching of the apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. They were also happy to share with others what they had. Fellowship is known in the Greek language as 'Koinonia.'

### **Unity in Faith**

Fundamentally, it is faith that makes the Church a fellowship. Our faith is in Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as revealed by Jesus. It is the faith in the salvation, made real by the Son of God, who was sent by the Father, for the redemption of the world and completed by the Holy Spirit. Thus all the believers are united in one Spirit through one Lord, one faith and one baptism.

### **Unity in Sacraments**

Having been made into one body with Jesus through baptism, we are nourished by the Holy Eucharist and other sacraments. St. Paul says that the cup of blessing that we share is a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The Church is the fellowship of those who participate in the one and the same life by participating on the same spiritual drink and the same spiritual food. Thus the members of the Church are united through one baptism and one bread for all (1 Cor. 10:3-4).

### **Unity in Apostleship**

Jesus formed the Church through the apostles whom he chose, anointed in the Spirit and sent to preach and baptize. He wanted the Church to be led, sanctified and instructed by the apostles and those who took their place after them, the Bishops. Fellowship with the apostles and the Bishops is essential for maintaining the fellowship of the believers in the Church. This is called unity in apostleship. The believers who are united like this have one faith, one sacrament and one apostolic leadership. In this way all the believers are made into one body in the Holy Spirit.

## Fellowship among the Churches

The Church is the body of Christ. In the Church, the members live out their Christian life in individual Churches under one common authority of the Pope. The Catholic Church is the fellowship or communion of these Individual Churches. There exists a wonderful unity among these Churches. Diversity does not affect the unity of the Church, rather it enhances it and reinforces it.



There are twenty-four individual Churches in the Catholic Church which are different in liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline. Each of these Churches has sprung up in its own particular historical context and is rooted in a particular culture. Each of them has its own life-style (CCEO 28:1). They, have all equal status in the Catholic Church.

These Individual Churches follow six liturgical traditions which are ancient. Of these, Byzantine, Antiochian, Alexandrian, Assyrian and Armenian are of Oriental liturgical traditions and Roman (Latin) tradition is Western.

### Syro-Malabar Church

The Mar Thoma Christians of India received the light of faith from Thomas, the apostle and became Christians in the very first century itself. The Syro-Malabar Church has been following the Mar Thoma Tradition in an unbroken manner right from the start. The Syro-Malabar Church follows the Oriental Syrian Liturgical Tradition with certain adaptations to Indian culture. Both the Syro-Malabar Church and Chaldean Church follow the Oriental-Syrian liturgical tradition. Though those Churches sprang up and grew outside the Roman Empire, they have always maintained unity and fellowship with the See of Peter. The Syro-Malabar Church, having its own individuality and tradition, is united in fellowship with the Catholic Church through Faith, Sacraments and Jurisdiction.

Let us be proud of being part of the Catholic Church, established by Jesus himself. Let us work together in fellowship with one another for the unity and growth of the Church.

# THE CHURCH

## The Western Church (Roman)

## The Eastern Churches

Byzantine	Antiochian	Alexandrian	Assyrian	Armenian
Albanian Belarusian Bulgarian Croatian&Serbian Greek Hungarian Italo - Albanian Macedonian Melkite Romanian Russian Ruthenian Slovak Ukrainian	Syrian Maronite Syro-Malankara	Coptic Ethiopian Eritrean	Chaldean Syro- Malabar	

### Word of God to Read and Meditate

John : 17:20-26

### Word of God to Remember

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me ( Jn. 17:21).

### Let us Pray

Lord, let all those who believe in you become one in the Church.

### My Resolution

I shall work and pray for unity in the Church

## To Think with the Church

This is the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it, and which he raised up for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (Vat. II, The Church No. 8).

## To Know the Mother Church

The difference of opinion among the Mar Thomma Nazranies after the 'Koonan Cross Oath' gradually led to division among them. One section joined themselves to the Antiochian Church and later came to be known as 'Puthenkoottukar'. Efforts for unifying the divided Church began in all earnestness. It was led by Kariyattil Ouseph Malpan and Paremmakal Thomma Kathanar. Infact these two leaders met the Pope and submitted to him a request for the unification of the divided groups. The Pope appointed Kariyattil Ouseph Malpan as the Metropolitan of the diocese of Kodungallur on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1783, but unfortunately he died in Goa on his return journey. 'Varthamana Pusthakam' by Paremmakal Thomma Kathanar is a travelogue on their visit to Rome. The body of the Metropolitan was buried in Goa, but later his mortal remains were transferred to St. Mary's Church, Alangad, and buried there.

## Questions

1. The Catholic Church is the fellowship of the individual Churches. Explain.
2. What are the factors that constitute the basis of the Church's fellowship and unity?
3. Which are the main liturgical traditions in the Catholic Church?
4. To which liturgical tradition does the Syro-Malabar Church belong?
5. On what basis are the individual Churches formed?