

Take-Home Three

The Church He Actually Built

Unless Someone Guides Me | Session Three

What We Found

Jesus gives a procedure for a dispute in Matthew 18, and the third step is to tell it to the church. You cannot report a matter to an invisible body, and an invisible body cannot declare anyone an outsider. The command only works if there is a church you can find, name, and hear back from.

We counted the ones in Ephesians 4: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Paul's unity is doctrinal and visible, not merely a shared feeling.

And we said out loud what the Church actually teaches about those who believe in Christ and have been validly baptized but are not in full communion with the Catholic Church: they are accepted as brothers and sisters in the Lord, they bear no personal guilt for a separation they were born into, and real elements of sanctification and truth are found among them.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, ch. 8

Around the year 107, on his way to be killed, he tells the Smyrnaeans that where the bishop appears, there the people should be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is the earliest surviving use of the phrase, and it points at something you can find.

Voice of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage

On the Unity of the Catholic Church, chs. 6-7

Writing during an actual schism, he says a person cannot have God for a Father who does not have the Church for a mother, and compares her to the seamless garment the soldiers refused to tear.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

City of God, Book XVIII, ch. 49 (summary)

Against those who held the true Church contains only the pure, he argued from the parables that she is a mixed body until the harvest, and that we are not the ones who do the sorting.

Ready Response

Three ways this comes up, and what to do.

“The real Church is invisible.” Start with the part that is true and mean it: God alone reads hearts, and every visible church has people in it who are not living the faith, and our Lord said it would be that way. Then put him the question you sat with yourself. In Matthew 18 our Lord tells you to take it to the church. Ask your friend, without any edge, how he would actually carry that out. Not to corner him. Ask it because you tried to answer it yourself and found you could not do it with a church you cannot find.

“Denominations are just branches of one vine.” Do not defend the divisions. They are a wound, Catholics own a share of the history that made them, and saying so as your own is worth more than any argument that follows. Then give him the thing that surprised you: the Church herself teaches that baptism truly joins them to Christ and that there is real, though imperfect, communion between us (CCC 818-819). And then Ephesians 4:5, which you counted through in the room. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Ask him what one faith about baptism would sound like.

“So my grandmother is going to hell?” Answer straight away and warmly, before anything else: no, the Church does not teach that. We cannot pronounce on anyone’s eternal state, and the Church has never taught that a person is damned simply for not being Catholic, least of all someone who bears no personal guilt for a division she was born into. Baptism truly joins a person to Christ. Say the kind thing before you say the theological thing. If it is his grandmother, the kind thing is most of what he was asking for.

Live It This Week

- Read Acts 2:42-47 and notice how ordinary and how organized it is.
- Pray once this week for Christian unity, by name, for someone not in full communion with the Church.
- Find out who your bishop is, if you do not know, and pray for him.
- If you have said something dismissive about another Christian community, go repair it.

Memory Verse

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” **Ephesians 4:5**

Before Next Session

Read: Isaiah 22:19-22. It is four verses about a palace official you have probably never heard of. Read it twice and hold onto it.

Catechism: CCC 771, 811-822. If you read only two, read 818 and 819.