

The Holiness of the Church

We say in the Creed that we believe in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." In what sense is the Church "holy"? After all, there is a lot of sin and scandal in the Church these days.

The holiness of the Church may be difficult to understand and accept at first blush. After all, the Church is composed of frail, weak, sinful human beings. We are able to boldly proclaim the Church's holiness only because individually and as God's family we have Christ in us, transforming us, healing us, reconciling us to the Father.

As a holy people, we have been consecrated and set apart by God. As St. Peter writes, we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," called to "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The Church is the bride of Christ, for whom Christ died. According to St. Paul, in laying down His life for His bride, Christ sanctified and cleansed His Church, making her holy and without blemish (cf. Eph. 5:21-32). We become part of the "Communion of Saints" through Baptism, and "saint" is another word for "holy one."

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) drives home this point: "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" (as quoted in Catechism, no. 827). We don't join the Church because we're already saints, but because the Church is able to help us sinners to become saints.

We are all in need of the divine Physician. The Church is a hospital or rehabilitation center for sinners, not a country club for the self-righteous (cf. Mk. 2:17).