

What Makes a True Church?

Jesus established a Church with His apostles in order to live His resurrected life among us today and bring us His saving merits. He promised He would be with this Church until He comes again in glory. Somehow, especially in the last 500 years, parts of Christianity have fragmented into thousands of separate groups, each claiming to be the Church. How can we tell which one really is the Church?

1. Since Jesus delegated His message and commission to the apostles, the true Church must have an unbroken line of successors of the apostles. We call such successors, bishops. Without true bishops there can be no Church. Bible alone is no substitute.
2. Since Jesus promised the apostles He would not abandon His Church, the true Church must be the oldest. A later fellowship started by a human founder cannot be the true Church.
3. Jesus commissioned His Church for all people and nations to the ends of the earth. That's what the word, "catholic," means. Local or national fellowships by themselves cannot be the fullness of the true Church.
4. Without true Eucharist there is no true Church. Only the apostles were present at the Last Supper. Only the apostles and those to whom they pass on their commission can be the visibility of the risen Jesus offering His timeless sacrifice to the Father. Thus only authentic bishops and their priests can bring about today, the visible Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus for our salvation.
5. The fullness of the apostolic Church was born on the first Pentecost. The apostles, some disciples, and Mary were there. Mary has an important place in the full gospel Church. The Holy Spirit, the spouse of Mary, guides, empowers, protects, and guarantees the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Like Mary became pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit makes the true Church pregnant with the Body of Christ among us today.

In everyday language we may speak of the Baptist Church, or the Episcopalian Church, but more properly these should be called Christian fellowships. They are not really Churches in the full sense of the word. In like manner we speak of the Roman Catholic Church, but, "Roman Catholic," is a name outsiders gave us. Just saying, "Catholic Church," is enough and more accurate. We are the one.