

Unity of the Church

As Catholics, when we speak of the Church, we usually think of the Catholic Church. However, all Protestant denominations consider themselves to be part of the one Church established by Jesus. In the centuries since the Protestant “Reformation”, the number of Christian denominations has skyrocketed to the neighborhood of 35,000, each with a different approach to the truth and all claiming to be “the Church.”

In the document ***Dominus Iesus*** - Benedict VI (*then, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger*) points out that these denominations “*are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.*” In other words, whereas all faithful non-Catholics who are baptized in the Trinitarian formula (*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*) are Christians, they are not in full communion with Christ’s Church, which is the Body of Christ.

Jesus established **one** Church. In **Matt. 16:16-19**, he told St. Peter, “*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*” He never intended for there to be multitude of differing factions, all claiming to be, “**the Church.**” At the Last Supper, our Lord Jesus prayed fervently for the **unity** of his Church – that they remain **one** as he and his Father are **one** (**John 17:20-23**). This hope of Christ was dashed by the Reformation and the constant splintering that has occurred ever since. This splintering includes the many dissident pseudo-Catholic groups and individuals who have separated themselves from the Church in varying degrees because **they** have decided that the Church has gone off-track. In short, they have made the judgment that Christ was **wrong** when he said that the gates of hell wouldn’t prevail against his Church, forgetting the words of Christ to his Church in **Luke 10:16**: “*Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.*”

Jesus and his Church are **inseparable** as we see in **Acts 9:4-5**, where he identifies the Church with his very self. In **Eph, 1:22-23**, St. Paul tells us that the Church is “*the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.*” In **1 Tim. 3:15**, he refers to the Church as “*the pillar and foundation of truth.*” Christ himself is not divided and neither can his Church – his **Body** be.

As Catholics, we must pray for the unity of **all** Christians – so that all will honor the prayer of Jesus by returning home to the **fullness** of Christ. And, although separated from the fullness of Christ - they are our brothers and sisters in Him through Baptism.