

“The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47)

✠ Lecture III: The Church & Our Salvation ✠

✠ The ‘do-it-yourself’ Salvation:

“Suppose you take a trip to Cairo, Egypt. You’re sitting one afternoon at a table in a crowded sidewalk café having tea. A young man walks up and, with a heavy accent, asks to join you. A bit surprised, you invite him to sit down. You discover his name is Wong Lee, and he is an outspoken communist from China who is in Cairo for a brief summer tour. Wong Lee asks you to tell him something about life in America, including what it’s like to live in a democracy. You begin by talking about various opportunities in the business world, the possibility of owning property. Then you move on to the political arena, voting and electoral process. You tell him about the checks and balances of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government and something of how state and local governments work as well. You’re honest about the shortcomings of the system, too, and start to wrap up your remarks about the essential freedoms under a democracy.

But before you can finish, Lee interrupts. “That’s it!” he exclaims with the first real excitement of the afternoon in his voice. “This is what I want!”

“What do you mean?” you ask, bewildered.

“I mean, I want to embrace democracy! It’s better than what we have as communists. Far better. Right now at this moment, I am telling you I am committing myself to democracy!”

“You’re stunned. You’ve never seen anything like this in your life. Half an hour ago, you barely knew this man. Now you have a new convert to democracy on your hands. You collect your thoughts for a minute, and then begin to offer some direction.

“Well, let’s see, Lee. This is going to mean that we’ll have to make arrangements to bring you into the country and make you an American citizen.”

“What do you mean?” Lee asks. “Why should I move?”

“So you can live out your life under a democracy, so you can experience this freedom and opportunity,” you explain.

“But my home is in Beijing,” Lee retorts. “I have no intention of moving away from there. I’ll study about democracy and learn on my own. I will memorize the Constitution and learn the Bill of Rights. And I can subscribe to the *Congressional Record*.”

Your heart sinks. What he’s saying will not work, and you know it won’t work. How can anyone be committed to democracy and be perfectly satisfied to remain living under communism? It’s impossible. But you can’t get Lee to understand. He’s into democracy merely on a mental level, and it will do him little or no good.

Such and worse is the plight of those who try to follow our Lord Jesus Christ – even zealously – but apart from the Church. They may be sincere, but they will never really get to know Him out there. For one must live within the body of Christ, be fed by her sacraments, be instructed in her true faith, and worship at her altar to attain the godliness and righteousness that lead to the Kingdom’s open doors.”

(Fr. Peter Gillquist: *Entering God’s Kingdom* published by Conciliar Press).

Protestants concentrate on the words of St. John, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (**Jn 3:16**) as if this was the only verse speaking about salvation in the entire Holy Bible. They try to justify themselves by saying that they are making the way of salvation easy before people by saying that it is not difficult to attain; it can be attained in a moment. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not do the same, He said, “**difficult is the way which leads to life**” (**Mt 7:14**). According to this heresy, people can attain eternal salvation through a spiritual life away from the Church Sacraments and Priesthood. Consequently, a person’s life becomes a mere individual relationship with God, and the words Church, Priesthood, and Sacraments disappear from one’s spiritual life.

→ St. Cyprian, the great martyr bishop of Carthage, said, “Anyone who leaves the Church of Christ behind cannot benefit from the rewards of Christ. Such people are strangers, outcasts, and enemies. You cannot have God as Father unless you have the Church as mother. **If any had been able to escape outside Noah’s Ark, there might have been a way of escape for those who are outside the Church.**” There is only one Church, and outside its bounds salvation is impossible: “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – outside the Church there is no salvation” (St. Cyprian: ‘*On the Unity of the Catholic Church*’).

→ Origen states that there is no salvation outside the Church, the house of redemption. According to him, Rahab (**Josh 2**) mystically represents the Church, the scarlet thread the blood of our Lord; and only those in her house were saved. He said: “If anyone wishes to be saved, let him come to this house where the blood of Christ is for a sign of redemption. Let no one therefore persuade himself or deceive himself; outside this house, that is **outside the Church, no one is saved**. The sign of salvation (the scarlet thread) was given through the window because Christ by His incarnation gave us the sight of the light of Godhead as it were through a window that all might attain salvation by that sign which shall be found in the house of her who once was a harlot, being made clean by water and the Holy Spirit, and by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and power for ever and ever.” (Fr. Tadros Malaty: ‘*The Church*’)

✠ The Church conveys salvation to people through:

1. The Ministry of the Word (Evangelism):

The Church received this ministry from the Lord Himself when He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (**Mk 16:15**). So the apostles gave themselves to this ministry and said when they ordained the seven deacons, “But we will give ourselves to prayer and **to the ministry of the word**” (**Acts 6:4**). Likewise St. Paul said, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast, for necessity is laid upon me. Yes, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel ... I have been entrusted with a stewardship” (**1Cor 9: 16, 17**). Through the preaching, the Church conveyed the faith to the people and without the Church no one would have attained salvation. St. Paul said, “That I might by all means **save some**” (**1Cor 9:22**). He also said to St. Timothy, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, continue in them, for in doing this you will both **save yourself and those who hear you**” (**1Tim 4:16**). The angel told Cornelius, “Call Simeon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and your household **will be saved**” (**Acts 11:4**). Since the first century, heresies started to appear and it was the Church – guided by the Holy Spirit – who stood firm against the heretics and defended the sound apostolic faith teaching the people the correct way of salvation. Champions of the faith like St. Athanasius and St. Cyril kept the faith intact for the following generations. This is another aspect of the ministry of the word without which no one would have been saved since heretics will not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Gal 15:19-21**).

2. The Ministry of the Sacraments:

God made salvation attainable through the work of the Holy Spirit in the saving Sacraments and He entrusted the Church with these Sacraments. The Sacrament of Baptism is the foremost, the Lord said to the apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit” (**Mt 28:19**), He also said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (**Jn 3:5**). After baptism comes the Sacrament of Holy Unction (Confirmation) by which people receive the Holy Spirit to dwell in them (**1Jn 2:20,27**). Unfortunately, we sin after being baptized so God prepared for us the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. He said to the fathers of the Church, “If you forgive the sin of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (**Jn 20:23**). Finally, we have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord said that it is “for the remission of sins” (**Mt 26:28**). All these Holy Sacraments leading to salvation are administered to us through the Sacrament of Priesthood; thus, we recognize the importance of the Church and Priesthood for our salvation.

3. The Ministry of Pastor-ship and Reconciliation:

Had not this ministry been important for the salvation of people, the Holy Bible would not have mentioned that God had given some to be **pastors** for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ (**Eph 4:11-12**), nor would our Lord have said to St. Peter, “feed my lambs ... tend my sheep” (**Jn 21:15-16**). Pastor-ship is carried out by the Priesthood in the Church, St. Paul said to the bishops, “Take heed to yourselves and to the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (**Acts 20:28**), St. Peter said, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (**1Pet 5:2**). Was it possible that salvation be obtained without the ministry of pastor-ship?

Not at all... the Holy Bible says that the Lord “when he saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, **like sheep having no shepherd**” (**Mt 9:36**). These sheep are easily preyed upon by the devil that “walks about like a raring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (**1Pet 5:8**). Thus, the Church saves souls from the death of sin when she guides, seeks, and leads them to repentance. The Church is trying to reconcile people with God as St. Paul said, “God ... has given us **the ministry of reconciliation**... therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (**2Cor 5:18-20**). The ministry of reconciliation may be included under the Sacrament of Confession during which the priest gives the confessor spiritual guidance and advice, “He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will **save a soul** from death and cover a multitude of sins” (**James 5:20**).

4. Genuine Christian Fellowship:

God said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (**Gen 2:18**). Our Lord taught us to pray saying, “**Our** Father in heaven...” (**Mt 6:9**) not “**My** Father” for Christianity is not an individualistic religion, He also sent his apostles two by two (**Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1**). Indeed, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But **woe to him who is alone** when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (**Ecc 4: 9-10**). Lord Jesus Christ also said, “If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven” (**Mt 18:19**), no wonder it was written, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (**Acts 12:5**).

St. Paul wrote to the Romans saying, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (**Rom 1:11-12**). St. Paul describes the Church saying, “There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all members rejoice with it” (**1Cor 12:25-26**), “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (**Rom 12:15**), “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **fellowship of the Spirit**, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (**Phil 2:1-2**).

St. John said, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship with us**; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (**1Jn 1:3**). It is important to note that St. John said “that you also may have fellowship with us (the apostles)” for we cannot have fellowship with the Father and with His Son without having first fellowship with the apostolic faith in the Church. It was said about the early Church, “They continued steadfastly **in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (**Acts 2:42**) Indeed, “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have **fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanse us from all sin” (**1Jn 1:7**), the relation between salvation and true fellowship is emphasized here.