

Lesson 2
THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

**THE REMNANT IS NO LONGER JUST *THE FLOCK OF CHRIST* BUT BECOMES
THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The books of the Old Testament present us with the various accounts of how God led and protected His Flock through many periods of apostasy. Although many abandoned the Lord, a faithful *remnant* always remained.

At the time of our Lord there was small remnant of faithful Hebrews. The rest were divided into many diverse groups.

There were the **Sadducees** who were an upper class group which tended to blend Greek practices and customs into their faith. According to Gospels, they didn't believe in resurrection.

The **Pharisees** was a religious reform group which attempted to incorporate their laws into every aspect of life and bring the people under their control.

The **Zealots** were a political group which sought to overthrow Roman rule.

The **Essenes** was an ascetic which believed that the Hebrew faith had been corrupted.

There were also ascetic, isolated groups in the desert. They emphasized spiritual teachings based on apocalyptic visions.

Eventually the *Pharisees* assumed control of the Hebrew nation. They established a Rabbinical Council which opposed the Church and led the attacks on the Christians which eventually brought a complete separation between the Hebrew nation and the Church of Christ.

Those Hebrews who remained in the Flock became the Body of Christ. Our Saviour tells us:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever (John 6:53-58).

In Holy Communion we partake of Christ's Body and Blood, thereby uniting ourselves to *Christ*. In Baptism our rebirth and our re-creation begins:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5-6)

Saint Athanasius tells us that Christ is the principle of new life. In the Incarnation there is a new creation, the resurrected body of Christ becomes the origin of incorruptibility and life for all creation. He says: *The Word was made a bearer of flesh, that men might become bearers of the Spirit.*

Baptism is birth into the **Body of Christ**, the Church; the saving action of God who through water and the Spirit recreates his creation; the initial Mystery through which he who is immersed in water three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is cleansed from all sin and reborn.

Those who are separated from Christ's Body, however, cannot receive Grace, just as an arm separated from a human body cannot receive the nourishment of blood and nutrients necessary for life. Without being a member of Christ's body we can not grow in Christ. With Baptism our new life in Christ begins. The *Epistles* of Saint Paul have much to teach us about growth in the Body of Christ:

Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body (Ephesians, 5:23).

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (I Corinthians, 12:12-13)

We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Romans, 12:5).

With the **Fullness of the Grace of the Holy Spirit** which the Flock of Christ received at **Holy Pentecost** the small remnant was sent out into the world. *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world* (Matthew 28,19-20).

The Apostolic period extends from the Day of Pentecost to the repose of St. John, and covers about seventy years, from a.d. 30 to 100. The Church was originally centered in Palestine, and gradually extended over Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, India, Greece, Italy, Spain, England. The most prominent centres were Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome. Next to them were Ephesus, Thessaloniki and Corinth. Ephesus acquired a special importance by the residence and labors of St. John and the Theotokos. Samaria, Damascus, Joppa, Caesarea, Tyre, Cyprus, the provinces of Asia Minor, Troas, Philippi, Berea, Athens, Crete, Patmos, Malta, come also into view as points where the

Christian faith was planted. As early as a.d. 58 St. Paul could say: *From Jerusalem and round about even unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ* (Rom. 15:19). He afterwards carried it to Rome, where it had already been known before, and as far as Spain, the western boundary of the empire.

The nationalities reached by the Gospel in the first century were the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans, and the languages used were the Hebrew or Aramaic, and especially the Greek, which was at that time the organ of civilization and of international intercourse within the Roman empire.

St. Luke in the *Book of Acts* records the heroic march of Christianity from the capital of Judaism to the capital of heathenism with the same artless simplicity and serene faith as the Evangelists tell the story of Jesus; well knowing that it needs no embellishment, no apology, no subjective reflections, and that it will surely triumph by its inherent spiritual power.

The Acts and the *Epistles* of St. Paul accompany us with reliable information down to the year 63. A few years afterwards followed the destruction of Jerusalem, which must have made an overpowering impression and broken the last ties which bound Jewish Christianity to the Jewish nation. The event is indeed brought before us in the prophecy of our Saviour as recorded in the Gospels, but for the terrible fulfillment we are dependent on the account of Josephus, an unbelieving Jew, which, as the testimony of an enemy, is all the more impressive.

At the time of the conversion of Constantine, in the beginning of the fourth century, the number of Christians may have reached ten or twelve millions, that is about one-tenth of the total population of the Roman Empire. The rapid growth of the Church under the most unfavorable circumstances was miraculous. It was achieved in the face of an indifferent or hostile world, and by purely spiritual and moral means, without shedding a drop of blood except that of its own innocent martyrs.

Signs and wonders and extraordinary demonstrations of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, for the conversion of unbelieving Jews and heathens, attended the entrance of the Church into the pagan world. It took up its permanent abode with our fallen race, to transform it gradually, without war or bloodshed, by a quiet, leaven-like process, into the *People of God*. Modest and humble, lowly and unseemly in outward appearance, without silver or gold, but rich in gifts of the Holy Spirit, strong in faith, fervent in love, and joyful in hope; bearing in earthen vessels the imperishable treasures of heaven, it presented itself to all the nations of the earth as the only road to the *Kingdom of God*. At first an insignificant and even contemptible sect in the eyes of the carnal mind, hated and persecuted by Jews and heathens, the Faith of the Christians confounded the wisdom of Greece and the power of Rome, soon planted the standard of the Holy Cross in the great cities of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and proved itself the hope of the world.

Saints Peter, Paul, and John stand out most prominently as the chosen Three who accomplished the great work of the Apostolic Age, and exerted, by their writings and

example, a controlling influence on all subsequent ages. To them correspond three centres of influence, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome.

Our Lord himself had chosen Three out of the Twelve for his most intimate companions, who alone witnessed the Transfiguration and the agony in Gethsemane. These Saints became pillars of the Apostolic Church; Saints Peter and John by their long and successful labors, Saint James *the brother of the Lord* by drinking early the bitter cup of his Master, as the proto-martyr of the Twelve.

Saint Paul was called last and out of the regular order, by the personal appearance of the exalted Lord from heaven, and in authority and importance he was equal to any of the three pillars, but filled a place of his own, as the Apostle of the Gentiles. He had around him a small band of co-laborers and pupils, such as Saints Barnabas, Silas, Titus, Timothy, Luke.

Nine of the original Twelve, including Matthias, who was chosen in the place of Judas, labored faithfully and effectively, in preaching the gospel throughout the Roman empire and to the borders of the barbarians.

The labors of Saints James and Peter we can follow in the Acts to the *Council of Jerusalem*, a.d. 50, and a little beyond; those of Saint Paul to his first imprisonment in Rome, a.d. 61–63; Saint John lived to the close of the first century. As to their last labors we have no authentic information in the New Testament, but the unanimous testimony of Holy Tradition that Saints Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome during or after the Neronian persecution, and that Saint John reposed at Ephesus. The Acts breaks off abruptly with Saint Paul still living and working, a prisoner in Rome, *preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, none forbidding him.* A significant conclusion.