



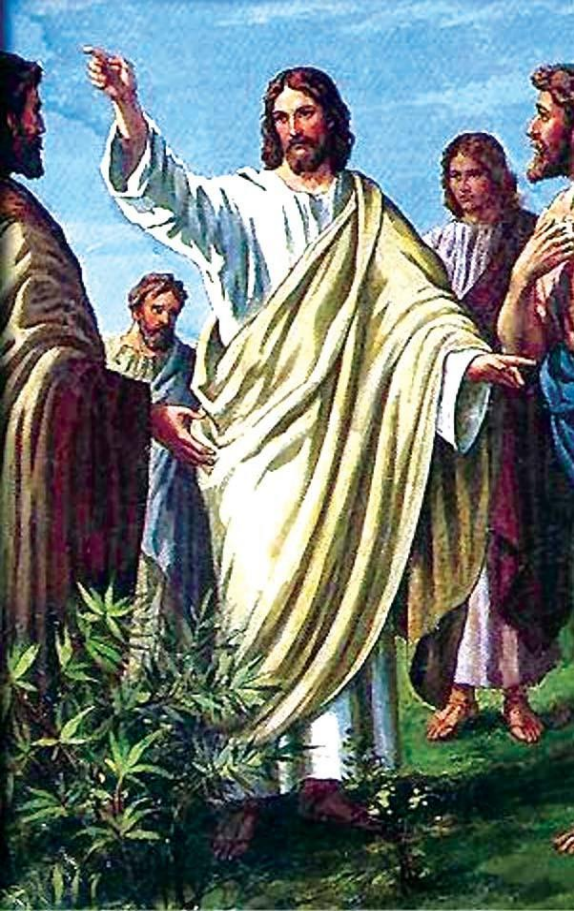
CHURCH THE PEOPLE OF GOD

CATECHETICAL TEXTBOOK SERIES OF THE SYRO - MALABAR CHURCH

LESSON 3

CHURCH : THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELIEVERS





When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” They replied to him: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”. Jesus asked them: “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus told him, “Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is heaven. I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven...” (Mt. 16:13-18).

These words of Jesus can be seen as the indication of Jesus establishing the Church. The most significant aspect is the confession of Peter that Jesus is Christ is the Son of the living God. Highly pleased with Peter's divinely inspired statement, Jesus established his Church on the foundation stone that is Peter. So the Church is the community of those who believe and confess that Jesus is Christ and the Son of the living God.

FAITH IS THE RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALL

Faith is man's response to the call of God, who reveals Himself. The expression of this response is a loving surrender to God. The people who listened to the speech of the Apostle Peter, on the day of the Pentecost, were so touched and moved that they asked this apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."(Acts 2 : 37-38). Accepting this call, they repented and received baptism. And they were added to the community of believers who accepted, Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The lives of our forefather Abraham and Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus, are models of faith. Abraham believed the Promise of God, although his wife was past the age of bearing and knew that, what was impossible with man was possible for God. The same is true with Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, who believed the message of the angel and submitted to the will of God.

Faith is founded on the belief that the Word of God will be done even if it is unintelligible for the human mind. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb 11:1). What underlines this faith is a deep love-relationship with God. Moved by love we surrender our mind, intelligence and heart to God in an act of faith.

The Community of the Believers in Jesus

Jesus is the revelation of God himself. In Jesus, God revealed Himself in a unique way to humanity. And Jesus on his part, through his life, death and resurrection revealed that He was the Son of God and as such, Lord and Saviour. God confirmed this revelation by raising Jesus from the dead. In the letter to the Romans we read: "...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10:9). So the Church is the community of people who accept Jesus, the revelation of God, and love Him and profess their faith in Him. Jesus moved by love for his Father surrendered his life to God on the cross. So faith consists in surrendering ourselves to the Will of God.



THE BASIC QUALITIES OF FAITH

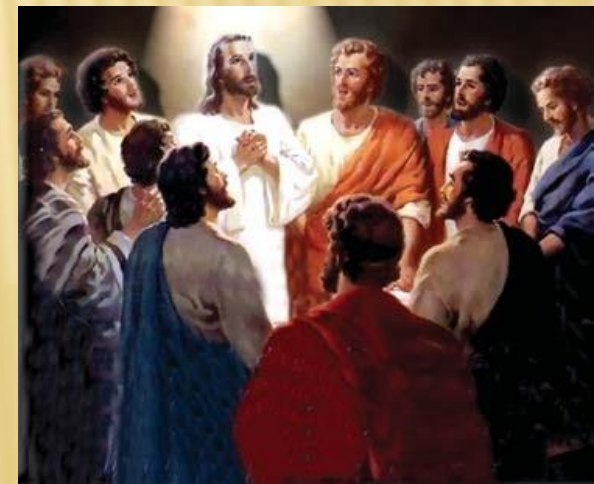
1. It is man's response to God who reveals Himself.
2. It is the total acceptance of all that God has revealed.
3. It is man's total obedience and self surrender.
4. It is the awareness that it is God who enables us to believe and strengthens us in our faith.
5. It is the awareness that faith is both man's response to God and a free gift of God.



THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL LEADS TO FAITH

The proclamation of the gospel is the door through which we came into faith. St. Paul asks, How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom.: 10:14) So we know how essential it is to preach in order to lead people to faith. The Proclamation of the Good News is the mission entrusted to the Church by the risen Saviour. He told his disciple, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:15)

Having received this mission from Jesus, the disciples went to different parts of the world proclaiming his Word. Their preaching and witnessing led many to faith in Jesus.



CONVERSION, THE NECESSARY ELEMENT OF FAITH

Listening to the Word of God should lead us to conversion of heart and faith in Jesus. Jesus began his public life by calling people to repentance. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mk. 1:15) Conversion means a change of heart. In Greek language it is called “**Metanoia**”. It literally means **'Return'**.



It is a call to return from the wrong, sinful path of life to the right path paved by this good news of salvation. **Listening to the word of God should lead to the change of heart and faith in Jesus.** Those who believe in him and accept him as Lord and saviour will be saved. In fact, Church is the community of people who are saved and moving towards the fullness of this salvation.

FAITH MAKES US ONE

Christian faith has two realms: individual and social. Fundamentally, it is a participation in the fellowship of the Church (Ch.9). Faith is our response to God's revelation. This kind of response always leads to fellowship. “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they ate their food with glad and generous hearts.” (Acts 2: 44-46).

It is through baptism that one enters into the fellowship of the Church. The other sacraments enhance our growth in the Church. Thus the Church is the community of people who respond to God's call in faith and live together in prayer and fellowship and sharing, being nourished by the Word of God and the sacraments.





**WORD OF GOD:
TO READ AND
MEDITATE**

Acts 2:1-47



**WORD OF GOD TO
REMEMBER**

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom : 10:9).

LET US PRAY

Lord, who gave us faith in the Church
through baptism, help us to live in
fellowship with others in the Church in
faith and love.

MY RESOLUTION

I will not miss any
opportunity to express
my faith in Jesus.



TO THINK WITH THE CHURCH

The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office:
it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life
of faith and love and by offering to God
a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name
(Vat. II, The Church, No. 12).

TO KNOW THE MOTHER CHURCH

The Mar Thoma Nazranies developed their faith, that they received from St. Thomas, in keeping with the cultures of the time and place. They developed a spirituality in accordance with Indian culture. The Oriental Syrian liturgy, which they followed, was developed in adaptation with the Indian culture. In course of time she lost many traditional values which were very much in keeping with Indian cultures. Today our Church, who has been given the status of a self governing Church (Sui juris Church), is trying to recover what we have lost and to adapt according to the needs of the time and culture.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by faith?
2. How is faith reflected in the lives of Abraham, our father in faith and Mary, the Mother of Jesus?
3. Name the five attributes of faith.
4. The proclamation of the Gospel leads to faith. Explain.
5. Explain the community dimension of Christian faith.



THANK YOU