**Did Jesus Really Mean to Establish a Church?**

There are four defining marks of the Church. The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. These are important words because they give a description of what “church” is. The Church is set apart from other organizations and structures as “holy.” It is “one” rather than a collection of ways. It is universal throughout the world as” catholic.” It is apostolic carrying on the work of the twelve apostles through their successors, our bishops. These marks are obvious in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. We believe it is the one God-given, unique way to live a Christian life.

Many non-Catholic Christians challenge that our Church does not resemble what Jesus proscribed in his teaching. They see an organization developed by men that took several centuries to take shape. They cannot find a basis for an order of succession beyond Peter. They see a simple path to Christian living as “saying yes to Jesus” rather than allegiance to an organization. They look to New Testament scripture and find no mention of buildings, hierarchy, or liturgical movements. If anything, they argue that New Testament scripture warns of the danger of this formality, as Jesus often criticized the Pharisees for paying attention to organization and ritual rather than living in a godly way. Hopefully, most conversations about the uniqueness of the Catholic Church happen among friends with some desire to understand.

In matters of faith, we are talking about attaining eternal life. In that sense, we need to really know why we are Catholic. Points to consider direct us to see the Catholic Church as the one church of Christ. Jesus named Peter as the “rock” upon whom to build his church. It makes no sense to think Jesus put this authority in place only to disappear after Peter’s death. Jesus worked hard for unity among his followers. St. Paul’s letters give evidence of that decades later as Paul challenges diverse communities with the observation: “there are divisions among you.” In Acts of the Apostles, serious matters were brought to the authority of Peter and settled. We read in scripture how an organization, first apostles (bishops) and then deacons, is embedded in local structures connected to the authority of Rome. Over the first four hundred years after the Resurrection, beliefs were clarified, books of the Bible recognized, and liturgical life developed. All of this came from the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Yes. Jesus meant to establish a church, and it is the one that lives on as our Roman Catholic Church.