

Ask Fr. James

Are the "Roman" Catholics Romanians or are they descendants of the Romans who killed Jesus Christ?

The answer to the above questions is NO! Our proper name has always been "Catholic Church." The term "catholic" simply means "universal," referring to the Church that was already "everywhere." The Creed which we recite on Sundays and holy days speaks of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. As early as the year A.D. 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop, already used the word catholic to describe the church. He wrote, "Where the bishop is present, there is the Catholic Church" (Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8:2).

The term "Roman" Catholic was actually coined by the English-speaking Protestants, after the Protestant Reformation of the 1500 to argue for the "branch theory," i.e., that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the creed was supposed to consist of three major branches of Christianity, the Anglican, the Orthodox and the so-called Roman Catholic. It was part of their ploy to portray the pope as the leader of just a faction of Christianity and to deny British Catholics many basic rights.

Christ founded only one Church his Church – on Peter, with the guarantee of indefectibility in the face of the persecutions, divisions and obstacles of every kind which she would encounter in the course of history (cf. Mt 16:18). Therefore, only one Church exists, which we confess, in the Creed as "one, holy, Catholic and apostolic."

The Second Vatican Council, in n. 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, stated that "this Church, constituted and organized as a society in this present, world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with the Pope. All through history, Catholics, we never referred to itself as 'Roman Catholic', but simply as "Catholic." However, today, when filling government forms, we are required to say RC, and this is to distinguish us from whatever sects, schisms or splinter groups might have grown up here and there, in opposition to the 22 *sui iuris* rites that comprise the Catholic Church (i.e. Maronites, Chaldeans, Ukrainians, Syro-Malabar, etc).

This is notwithstanding the fact that the first serious division in Catholic Church was between the "orthodox" Catholics in Eastern Europe and the "Catholics" in Western Europe in the year 1054. Despite the division, it maintained its Catholic unity. However, in the sixteenth century, especially the 1517 of Protestantism, brought divisions and new nomenclatures to describe churches. The term catholic was already understood from the beginning of Christendom to be an especially fitting name because the Catholic Church was for everyone, not just for a section of Christians.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) in our own day has concisely summed up all the reasons why the name of the Church of Christ has been the Catholic Church. It states: "The Church is catholic," the Catechism teaches, "[because] she proclaims the fullness of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation. She is sent out to all peoples. She speaks to all men. She encompasses all times. She is 'missionary of her very nature'" (CCC #. 868).