

Ask, Father James:

What are the four marks of the Church?

The Catholic Church has always identified four marks as intrinsic to the church's self understanding of its nature and definition. These marks are essential features of the Church and her mission. These marks are derived from the profession of the faith wherein all Catholics profess in the Creed that the church is *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*. In the Creed we profess:

"I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."

1. **The Church is One:** The church is the one body of Christ infused with the life of Christ through the Spirit. The church was created by the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day and the Spirit continues to animate the church and makes it one united body of Christ. The Spirit is the source of unity amidst diversity, plurality and difference. On that Pentecost Day, when the Spirit arrived, it bind Ethiopians, Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles together into one body in a convergence of diversity of tradition, perspective and experience.
2. **The Church is Holy:** Holiness marks the character of the body of Christ. This is because the church is the temple or habitation of the holy God. We are joined as one with God through the mediation of God's son, Jesus Christ. Although the church struggles as a collection of sinners, the church is made holy through the out pouring of the Spirit into the body of Christ.
3. **The church is Catholic:** Catholicity means it does not admit of regionalism, sectarianism, factionalism and heresies. The church is universal in living out the teachings, scripture and ministry of the church, including the celebration of the Eucharist. On the Day of Pentecost, Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs; all of them declared the wonders of God in our own tongues and languages (Acts 2:5-11). All these people prefigured the catholicity of the faith, the church and overcame the diversity of Babel.
4. **The church is Apostolic:** Apostolicity points to the authority of the church, her ministry, scripture, sacraments, teachings, all built on foundation of the prophets and the Apostles of Christ. Apostolicity derives first from the apostles themselves, and gives credence to apostolic succession for the faithful transmission of the faith and fidelity to the apostolic teaching. Apostolicity is a recognition that initially, the twelve were the 'sent ones' whose mission was to baptize and make disciples of all nations, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, and to witness to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:45-49). Later, Paul, Silas and Timothy (Romans 16:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:16) were all recognized and sent with these apostolic functions.

For further reading, see Matthew 28:19; John 17:20-21; Ephesians 2:19-20, 4:1-6, 5:25-27 and Catechism of the Catholic Church CCC: nos. 811-12.



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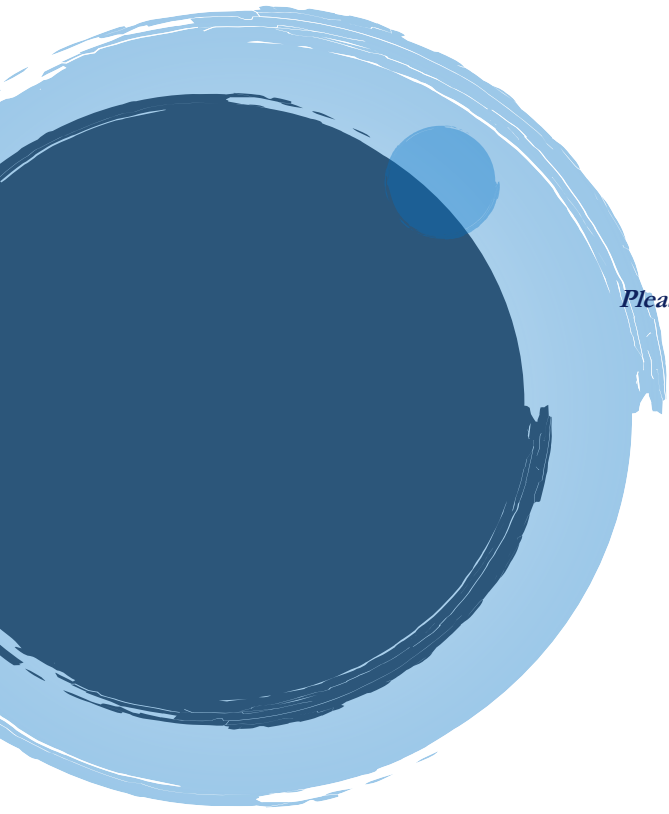


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