

# Unit One

# Who Am I? Who Are We?

## Lesson 2

### On This Rock: The Roman Catholic Church

#### heart to Heart

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.....

*St. Francis of Assisi*

*Here I Am, Lord, p. 29*



#### A Backward Glance

1. The story in Mark 8:22-25 of Jesus healing a blind man, reminds us above all that

- a. Eyesight is a gift of God       b. Having the right friends can put you in the right place  
 c. We need God for 20/20 spiritual vision       d. Faith comes late in your life

2. The Armenian Church can best be described as

- a. Eastern Orthodox       b. Universal Apostolic  
 c. Greater Orthodox       d. Oriental Orthodox

3. The Armenians could not attend or approve the decisions made in this council:

- a. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)       b. The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)  
 c. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD)       d. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

4. Milestone events when God is especially present and bestows a special grace are called:

- a. Eucharistic celebrations       b. Sacraments  
 c. Rites of initiation       d. Rites of passage

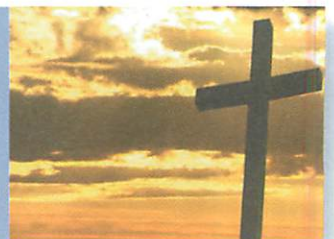
5. The foundation of our Holy Tradition is

- a. The priesthood       b. The Bible  
 c. Canon law       d. The Divine Liturgy

#### Verse Master

“So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”

*Galatians 6:10*



# A Concise Guide to the...Roman Catholic Church

## A Brief History

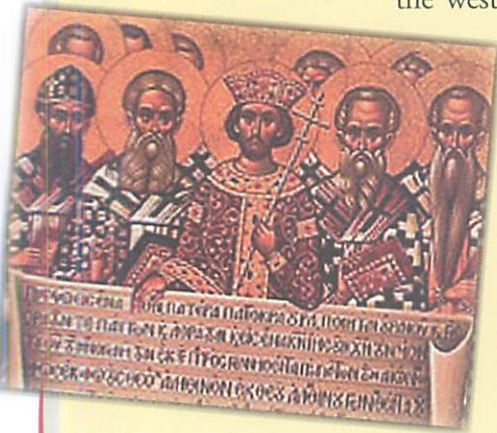
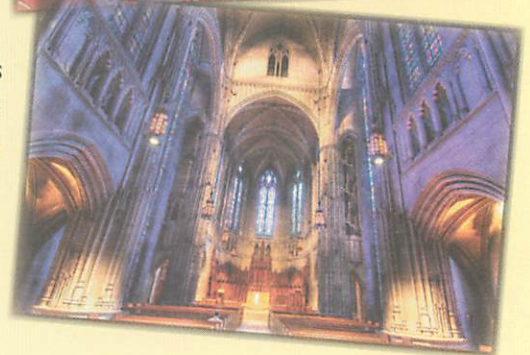
On one level, the variety of Christian churches is easy to understand. Imagine an organization—devoted, let's say, to the love and study of nature—begins in one city and then develops chapters all over the world. It would be easy to see how different agendas and approaches would arise. Group A in the American Northwest might decide to protest the cutting down of forests and become political activists and feel sure that activism is most important to their mission. Group B in the Northeast might think it wiser to create activities for people who use urban public parks. A fanatical Group C in another place might decide to immediately imprison anyone trespassing on a nature preserve! It would not be unlikely that each group finds the other's agendas wrong and misdirected. And sometimes they are. Groups A and B could easily come to terms with each other's approaches, but it is questionable whether Group C's belief would find any reasonable followers.

The Roman Catholic Church began as the same community of believers that gathered around Jesus and then spread to the four corners of the world, including Rome. By the fifth century, when the Western Roman Empire finally fell, the Roman (also known as the Latin) Church had become a political as well as a spiritual power.

“Catholic” actually means “universal” but became the specific “tag” of the western church to differentiate it from

the Eastern Orthodox Church when they separated from each other in what is called the Great Schism, brought about by the “filioque” (fee-lee-oh-kweh) controversy (see Scenic Overlook for more on that one!).

Prior to that schism, the Roman Catholic Church, centered in Rome, participated in seven Councils it considered Ecumenical with the Eastern Orthodox (but not the Armenian Church, if you remember). After 1054, it continued its own governance through the leadership of its bishops and councils, developing specific liturgical and pious traditions.



## Basic Beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church

What do Roman Catholics believe and how have they organized themselves *differently* from the Armenian Church? Here's the same list of basic beliefs of the Armenian Church from Chapter One. *Differences* appear in italics.

1. Jesus Christ, Son of God, who made it possible for us to share in eternal life through his sacrifice on the cross.



2. The Holy Trinity: three persons in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *While the Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, the Catholic Church believes that He proceeds from both Father and Son, the definition that was a major cause of the Great Schism of 1054.*

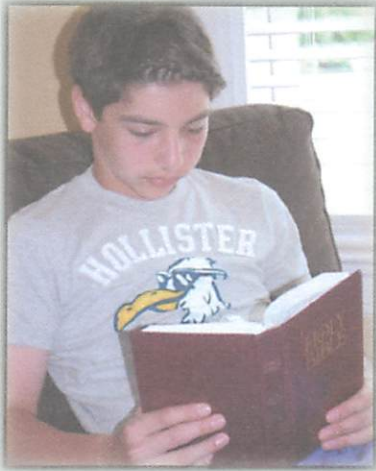
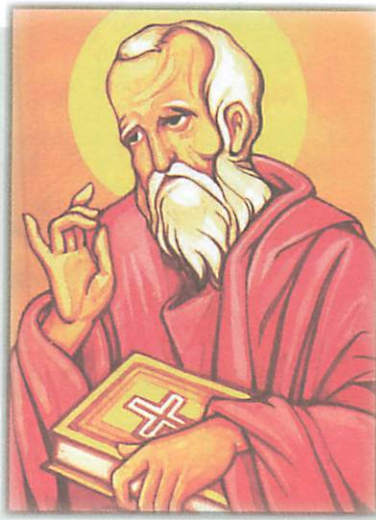
3. Participated in seven "Ecumenical" Councils. Additional local councils continued the process of defining the faith.

4. A sacramental life and milestone events when God is especially present and confers special grace. Those sacraments begin with baptism (*with a sprinkling of water rather than immersion*) which is the spiritual birth that follows our physical birth. *Infants are baptized but not confirmed until they are considered nominally adults (approximately at age 12). First communion is given at age seven, considered to be the age of reason.* There are seven sacraments: baptism and chrismation, *confirmation (anointing with simple oil, not Holy Muron, as an affirmation of faith), penance (also done for the first time at age seven) and Holy Communion, ordination, marriage (the priest only offers a prayer of blessing for the marriage, but it is the couple themselves who are giving the sacrament to each other) and anointing for the sick and dying, for all people.*

5. Holy Communion, the most important sacrament, dispensed during our Divine Liturgy or *badarak*. It is this gift of Jesus himself, bread and wine that become body and blood, which feeds our souls. At liturgy, we join all our separate selves and voices to become One Church, to which we were grafted at baptism.

6. The Church; this is the heart and hearth of our faith, a place where we worship, pray, serve, and learn together with the other members of our extended Christian family.

7. We are led in our worship and sacramental life by an ordained ministry, currently restricted to men, in three basic ranks: deacon, priest and bishop. *All ordained religious orders – priests, as well as the teaching and service ministries of nuns and monks – are unmarried.*



8. *A hierarchical leadership at the apex of which is the Pope, considered the successor to St. Peter whom Roman Catholics consider to be the first Pope (an interpretation of Jesus' words to Peter (Matthew 16: 18-19.) The Pope lives in the center of the international headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church—the small city-state of Vatican City in Rome. He is advised by a council of archbishops known as the College of Cardinals.*

9. The Holy Bible as the foundation and main source of a rich Holy Tradition that comprises our sacraments, feasts, saints, canon law, music, art and much more. All of these inform our faith. Since the Bible came to be through an inspired process *within* the church, it is best understood as we read it with the guidance of the church through its trained leaders. We also read it privately for ongoing spiritual support and enlightenment.

10. Prayer is our means of growing closer to God and his will for us, so we use it both formally through the formal prayers of the community and through our own ongoing very personal conversations. We believe that God fills us with his wisdom, slowly, over time.

11. *There is considerable definition and reflection on the character of God, the judgment and eternal life and other mysteries. For example, sins have been defined in various degrees (venal, etc.) and penance must match accordingly. Such specific concepts as limbo, an intermediate stage for the unbaptized, or purgatory, where souls remain as their sins are prayed for by the living.*

12. *Mission work is carried out to spread the faith and convert non-believers to Christianity. The bishops of the Church act as the voice of Christian conscience to governmental leaders in order to protect life and ensure justices to all people.*

## Remember

*The Roman Catholic Church shares most of the basic beliefs of the Armenian Church.*

## Scenic Overlook

The "Great Schism" (*skih-zum* means a separation or division) refers to the formal split that took place between the Eastern Church and the Western Church in 1054. Following many years of theological disputes, often bitter, the split was finalized over such issues as the question of the Pope's universal authority and the understanding of Spirit. The Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit came forth from both the Father and Son rather than only from the Father. The Latin word for "and the Son" is *filius* and this was how the controversy came to be known.



## Digging Deeper

Find out the definitions of these distinctly Roman Catholic practices/beliefs:

1. Stations of the Cross
2. Rosary
3. First communion
4. Ash Wednesday
5. Venial sin
6. Purgatory
7. Limbo

Armenian/  
Roman  
Catholic

Distinctly  
Armenian

Distinctly  
Roman  
Catholic