

## The Catholic Church

*In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.*

### Aim

- ✠ To know the History of the Catholic church
- ✠ To know major differences between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches

### Key verses

“<sup>d3</sup> Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (*Ephesians 3:14*)

### **Introduction:**

Since the beginning of Christianity, and after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christians had been following the same faith as delivered to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the 50 days the Lord spent with His disciples after His resurrection, He delivered the faith and the teachings to them. Then they went around to the whole world teaching the people the right Christian faith as given to them by our Lord.

Everyone at that time followed one church which was called “The One Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church”. There were no church names or differences.

At times, few heretics would come up with wrong doctrines or teachings. The church fathers would carry out meetings called “Councils”, in which they would investigate this new teaching with its founder, using the Holy Bible, and try to come to a conclusion.

There have been 3 major councils in the early years. They are not the very first councils in the history of the church but they are considered the major ones. These include The Council of Nicea, The Council of Constantinople and The Council of Ephesus. The outcomes of these councils were profound and important to our church. For example, the outcome of the council of Nicea was to produce our Creed that outlines our faith.

In these previous councils, the One Holy Universal Church, would try to correct the person who came up with the heresy. If this person decides to listen to the church, then it is ok but if he doesn't then the church had to excommunicate him.

### **The Formation of the Catholic Church:**

In the Year 430 AD, Nistorios the Bishop of Constantinople started a heresy about the nature of Christ. In year 451 AD, The Roman Pope Leo, supported the idea of Nistorios and said that our Lord Jesus Christ had 2 natures (A man and A God, separately). At this time, the Pope of Alexandria was Pope Dioscorous. They decided to carry out a council to investigate this teaching. This was called the council of Chalcedon (the city it was carried out). The church of Alexandria wasn't part of this council and didn't agree to its decisions and as a result Pope Leo excommunicated Pope Dioscorous and Pope Dioscorous excommunicated pope Leo and that's the main reason why until now, we are not allowed to have Holy Communion in the Catholic church and vice versa.

## The Catholic Church

This council led to the first division of the churches into an Orthodox and a Catholic Church.

The names Orthodox and Catholic don't reflect different religions, but they reflect other meanings; Catholic (meaning the entire world) because the majority of people at that time followed the teaching of the council of Chalcedon, which was to accept the 2 natures of Christ, while the word Orthodox (meaning a straight line) was named with that name because they didn't want to accept any new teachings and just wanted to follow the straight teachings as given by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Orthodox church has been known as the church that hasn't changed much in our doctrine and traditions since the time of St. Mark the apostle when he preached to us in Egypt on 61 AD.

### Major Differences between Orthodox and Catholic beliefs:

- **The One Nature of Christ:**

The Catholic church's major difference to us is that they believe that our Lord's divinity is so great, He can't possibly be insulted or tortured for our sake; He can't possibly feel weak or hungry or sleepy or tired. The Catholic Church did believe that in times of weakness, it was Christ the Man feeling these and in times of performing miracles or being glorified, it was Christ the God doing it. This was a dangerous belief because it meant that Christ was 2 persons and it would mean that salvation was not achieved.

In salvation, it had to be the Lord Jesus Christ who dies for the sake of human beings so if we say that only the humanity (or only Jesus the Human being) died, then that means that we are not saved because an Unlimited God had to die for us...

[This point has been resolved between the two churches](#) when Pope Shenouda the third and Pope Paul the sixth of the Catholic Church and other bishops discussed the matter and wrote down a declaration outlining that Our Lord Jesus Christ has one nature where His Divinity and Humanity are united without mingling or interchange or alteration.

We believe that "The Lord's Divinity never departed from His Humanity not even a single instant or a twinkle of an eye" and we also believe that "His Divinity united to His Humanity without mingling, or mixing or interchanging". We believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Incarnated God Who came to save us and died for our sakes. The testimony came from heaven during baptism when the Father testified and said "**This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.**" (Matt. 3:17). The Father didn't say this about the human nature of Christ Who was being baptized but He said this about the One Incarnated God and Lord Jesus Christ.

## The Catholic Church

- **St. Mary the virgin Mother of God:**

The Catholic Church honour St. Mary above limit. They consider that St. Mary was born with no sin at all; not even the sin of Adam and Eve like all of us. In that, they make her of similar level to our God Jesus Christ.

St. Mary the Virgin is the greatest of all humans. She was the only one on earth who was worthy of carrying our Lord Jesus Christ. She achieved this through her many virtues and great humility and love to God. After Adam and Eve sinned, our Lord waited for 5500 years to incarnate until all the circumstances were available for Him to come. The presence of His mother St. Mary was one of the things God waited for in order to come. That shows her greatness in our Orthodox church, but we never make her like God or never pray to her.

In August we have the fasting of St. Mary. In this fasting we fast as a memory of when the apostles fasted and prayed to God to let them see the assumption of the body of St. Mary. When we fast now, we remember this memory and we fast to God to listen to our prayers through the intercessions of St. Mary and not fast or pray to her directly.

We believe that St. Mary was born with the Sin of Adam and Eve like each one of us because our Lord Jesus Christ is the only one Who didn't carry the Sin of Adam and Eve because He is the Only One born without human seed, i.e. without a human father, but the Holy Spirit overshadowed St. Mary and she became pregnant in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Before St. Mary was pregnant with Christ, The Holy Spirit came upon her and cleansed her from this sin so that Christ comes inside her. She still needed salvation from this Sin as she prayed and said: **“My Soul magnifies The Lord and my Spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47)** If St. Mary was not in need of salvation (from the sin of Adam and Eve) like all of us, why she would need a Saviour?!

In the Holy Mass, we pray the hymn and say, “through the intercessions of the Mother of God St. Mary, O’ Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins” That is we are declaring that only through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we can be granted forgiveness.

We can't say that St. Mary had no sin, why? Because:

- If God can create a normal human being to be born without the initial sin of Adam and Eve then what need is there for Him to come and die for our Sake?
- If we say that St. Mary has no sin because she is no human, then we will also assume that Christ was not human and that would mean that the human race was not saved.

## The Catholic Church

- **Life After Death:**

The Catholic Church believes that after death, the soul of the person would go to wait in either Paradise or Hell or if someone was not good enough to go to paradise, they would go to a place called **Purgatory**. This is a place where souls would wait and be slightly tortured to make up for the good deeds that they didn't do on earth to qualify them for Heaven. After spending a certain amount of time in Purgatory, the qualified soul will go to wait in Paradise until the second coming. With the years, some corrupted people of the church started using this belief in order to take money from the people. They would tell them that if they pay money on earth, the time spent in purgatory would decrease accordingly and they used to take their money, the thing which turned many people off the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church also believes St. Mary to be the "Lady of Purgatory"; she has the authority to let people out of the purgatory when she wants to.

In the Orthodox Church, we don't believe there is any biblical or traditional reference to support this belief. We know from the bible that the waiting places are

- Paradise: When Christ Said to the right thief "**Today you will be with me in Paradise**" (Luke 23: 43)
- Hades

We believe that God gives us all the opportunity to repent on earth and as soon as the soul leaves the body, the person has a perception of whether they are going to Heaven or Hell. And this perception they know from the waiting place they are currently at, whether it was paradise or Hades. So there is no way someone is going to go to hell but then can work his way up and be granted Heaven... We also believe that the authority of putting someone in Heaven or Hell is up to God Himself and no body else or even the angels have the authority to grant someone Heaven or Hell.

- **Other differences:**

- The Coptic Church has a shield of wood in front of the altar separating it from the deacon seats and congregations. While this is missing from the Catholic Church. This wooden shield is known as the Iconostasis and the Coptic Church was persecuted in the old age and the Iconostasis was there so that if they were attacked, they would close it and the priest would escape with the Holy Body and Blood to a place underground in order to protect the Body and Blood. As the time passed and persecution ended, the church kept it and started introducing icons on this wooden door.
- The Coptic culture has always been known with their excellence in drawing pictures while the Roman culture is known for their excellence in sculpturing. As a result, the cultures are evident in the churches. The Coptic Church has icons and pictures while the Catholic Church usually has statues

## The Catholic Church

- Before having Holy Communion, us, the priest, the Alter, and the utensils of the alter all fast for 9 hours remembering the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ was in the womb of St. Mary for 9 months. With the Catholic Church, they fast for only 1-2 hours before the Mass.
  - We take the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ then the Blood and under no circumstances do we mix them together except when Abouna is going to a sick person to give him Holy Communion, he mixes them. In the Catholic Church, sometimes they can mix the Body and Blood of our Lord and take them together.

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, in the Orthodox church we have been following the teachings given to us by St. Mark the apostle and It is not our position to judge different churches but we know that God looks at the heart of each and everyone of us and deals with us accordingly because as it says in the Bible: “that Faith without Works is dead” (James 2:20).

**Glory is to God, forever. Amen.**