

Camp Nazareth 2012

Faith Enrichment Theme

“The Church is the Door to Life”

Scripture Verse

“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17)

Theme Overview

Our Summer Camp theme for 2012 is “The Church is the Door to Life”. It is an expression used by St. Irenaeus of Lyon in the 2nd century and comes from his work Against Heresies 3.4.1. The theme, together with this year’s Scripture verse (Mt. 19:17), will be given special emphasis throughout the week.

In this day and age we find a great emphasis on personal, individual spirituality. Even among pious Christians, and even among pious Orthodox Christians, we find a tremendous emphasis on a religious individuality that calls into question for many believers the need not only for a church, but the need for The Church. “I can be spiritual, I can be religious or I can be faithful” without going to church or without The Church. This thinking, and really more than that these days, this way of being Christian must be addressed by us because it calls into question the need for The Church, but on a deeper level it rejects Christ’s teaching about The Church and its place in God’s plan of salvation for His people.

In the Faith Enrichment curriculum and in other aspects of our camping program (services, sermonettes, evening cabin talks, etc.) we will be addressing this theme. The specific day’s themes for Faith Enrichment are as follows:

Sunday: “The Church is the Door to Life”
Monday: “Against a Churchless Christianity”
Tuesday: “The Words of Life”
Wednesday: “The Water of Life”
Thursday: “The Food of Life”
Friday: “The Church is the Door to Life” (review of week)

The 2012 Summer Camp Program will explore why we can say “The Church is the Door to Life” and what that means for our salvation with special emphasis being placed on the scripture verse: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt. 19:17).

The Faith Enrichment curriculum is divided into 4 teaching days, with an additional review day.

Monday

The Church is the Door to Life:
Against a “Churchless Christianity”

Goal: To understand what the Church is and why we need The Church. Special emphasis will be placed on what the Church has which makes it the “Door to Life” and why we do not believe in a “Churchless Christianity”. We will show how the Church is the very Body of Christ which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself established and gave to us as the “vehicle” of our salvation.

Morning Prayers:

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 28:10-17

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

Morning Sermon:

- The Church is called by St. Paul, and is, the Body of Christ.
- While we are individually members of the Body, we are still part of a whole. Just as an arm or leg or eye cannot exist without the rest of the Body, we cannot “exist” as Christians without the Body of Christ, the Church.
- The Church is a Community of Believers, not a group of individuals.
- The Church was established by Christ and nothing will prevail against it.
- The Church is established on the belief that Jesus is “...the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Faith Enrichment:

Main Points:

- Christ Himself established the Church
- The Church is the Body of Christ
- The Church is the Kingdom of God on earth
- Christ established The Church in order for us to be led/brought into His Kingdom through it
- Christ lives and is active in His Church

1. Christ Himself established the Church
 - a. Re-visit the Morning Gospel lesson – “...and upon this rock I will establish my church.”
 - b. The Church was established when our Lord SENT the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles in the upper room.
 - i. Jesus had promised this to the Apostles before He suffered, was crucified and died upon the Cross (reference Scripture)

- ii. At the moment of Pentecost the promise of Jesus Christ to build His Church on earth, as the Kingdom of God not of this world, became a reality
 - 1. On Pentecost a little flock of 120 believers in Jesus Christ became the seed from which grew new life for the salvation of the whole world, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The Church is not a human institution nor is it just a collection of individuals
 - i. The Church is divine in its origin
 - ii. Because Christ is divine, so is His Body, the Church
 - iii. While the Church originated on earth at a specific time and in a certain place, the Church can trace her divine origin and foundation before time and the creation of the world because her origin derives directly from the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ whose coming was predestined by the Father even before the foundation of the world – (1Pet. 1:19-20)
 - iv. The Church is not simply a society of those who believe in Christ. She is the divinely founded institution in which Christ dwells in those who believe in Him, and in which He grants His boundless gifts to them.
 - d. By bestowing on Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, Christ presented the Church to the world as the divinely-founded society of salvation – His Kingdom.
2. The Church is the Body of Christ
 - a. Re-visit the Morning Epistle lesson – 1 Corinthians 12:27 – “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
 - i. The Church and Christ are not two separate realities. They are one
 - b. Christ is inseparable from the Church
 - i. Christ is its founder, foundation and head.
 - ii. Ephesians 1:22-23 – “...and he has put all things under his feet and has made Him the head over all things for the church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”
 - c. The Church is a Community
 - i. We are members of that community – reference 1 Cor 12:12-13
 - ii. Baptism brings us into that community
3. The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth
 - a. Christ as the King brought with Him a Kingdom
 - i. A king is not a king without a kingdom
 - ii. The Kingdom has been bestowed upon us
 - 1. “...and left nothing undone to lead us to heaven, and bestowed upon us Your future kingdom...” – Anaphora prayer before “Holy, holy, holy...”
 - 2. Can reference crowns at Sacrament of Marriage
 - b. Christ as King dwells within the Church upon earth.
 - i. In essence the Church is the unity of God with men in Christ.
 - ii. But the Church is the Kingdom of God only for those who love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength with absolute faith.

- c. Without absolute faith, the Church is not that Kingdom, is not saving for those who are in it.
 - i. Without faith, the Church IS merely a human institution in which we only appear to be children of God
 - 1. This is what happened with the Temple and the Jews of Christ's day. Far from being divine, the Temple without faith became the den of thieves and robbers St. Matthew spoke of.
4. Christ established The Church in order for us to be led/brought into His Kingdom
- a. The Church is the ark/vehicle which transports us to the Kingdom of Heaven
 - i. Reference Genesis 6-8 and the account of Noah and the Ark
 - b. Christ Himself says the Church is pitted against the gates of hell – Mt. 16.18
 - i. Reference St. Paul – “evil powers in dark places (something like that)”
 - ii. It is not human institution created by man
 - c. Personal Faith is not a substitute for the Church. Both are required for salvation
 - i. While we may preserve a personal faith in our Lord, we must not lose sight of the fact that the only way to participate in the life of Christ and to follow Him into the Kingdom of Heaven is through His Holy Church
 - ii. Christ Himself was a dutiful attendee of the Temple and Synagogue worship – the “churches” of His day, as a boy with His family and as a man with His disciples.
5. Christ lives and is active in His Church
- a. Christ said He would be with His disciples always – ref. Matthew 28.20 and the Great Commission – “...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
 - i. This was a promise – God is faithful to His promises
 - b. This promise is fulfilled by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit
 - i. Reference the Epiklesis in the Liturgy
 - ii. Christ sent the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, upon the Apostles so that He might continue to be with them.
 - 1. But I will not leave you orphans/desolate – Jn 14:18
 - 2. Wait in Jerusalem until you have received the power from on high – Lk 24.49
 - 3. Jn. 14:16 – “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...”
 - c. In the person of the Holy Spirit, the glorified Christ returned to His flock, to abide with them forever – “I will not abandon you, I shall come to you.” – Jn 14.18; Mt. 28.20
 - d. The Church's Mission is none other than Christ's own Mission – to bring God's people back to Him – to reconcile them to Himself.
 - i. 2 Cor 5:18ff – It is the ministry of reconciliation given by God to the Apostles, to the Church...we are ambassadors for Christ bringing His message to the world.
 - ii. 2 Cor 6:1 – The Church works together with Christ

- e. “How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” – Genesis 28:17
 - i. God dwells with His people. In the time of the patriarchs this was true, and by the power of the Holy Spirit it remains true in the time of the Church

Evening Church Service: Moleben to the Mother of God

Sermon:

- St. Mary, the Mother of God, as the living ark of God – she carried in her womb not the Law (as the Ark did), but she carried the Law-giver
- St. Mary replaced the Jerusalem Temple as the dwelling place of God
- Connection between St. Mary and Jacob’s Ladder in the teaching of the Church. St. Mary becomes the meeting point of heaven and earth – she becomes the new Jacob’s Ladder, the very dwelling place/house of God
- Our need to have the same faith as Mary did in order for our Lord to “take up His Home in us”

Evening Prayers:

- The need we have to gather with Christ’s Body, the Church, as often as we can.
- The Divine Nature of the Church – it’s not a Kiwanis or Rotary Club, not an ethnic club
- The difference between going to Church and being an active member of the Body of Christ

Cabin Talk:

- Read and talk about the story of Jacob’s Ladder – Gen 28 – link Jacob’s fear and reverence to how we should enter and treat the Church
- In order to stay a member of the Body of Christ we have to stay “fit” as we would if we were playing sports. What are the ways we stay “fit” for Christ? – Prayer, prostrations, fasting, keeping the commandments, etc.
- Individual Spirituality vs. Church Community – we would say both are required, but in this day and age people believe we can have a “Churchless Christianity”

Tuesday

The Church is the Door to Life:
The Words of Eternal Life

Goal: To understand what St. Peter meant by saying to our Lord, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68-69). To understand that our Lord entrusted the saving message of the Gospel to His Apostles and therefore to His Church. To know that He entrusted the truth and all that pertains to the truth within the Church

Morning Prayers:

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Epistle: 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Gospel: John 6:63-69

Morning Sermon:

- Jesus didn't just give speeches like a politician. His speech was filled with divine and eternal life and St. Peter recognized and confessed this.
- But Peter and the disciples had to learn the truth – it took them a while and sometimes Jesus had to yell at them for being slow to understand. We too must struggle to understand the teaching of our Lord because it draws us to God.
- From the Epistle: “the church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth” – Teach what the words pillar and bulwark mean and how the Church supports, defends, protects and preserves the word of God.

Faith Enrichment:

Main Points:

- The Church contains the fullness of the truth and all that pertains to the truth
- The Church is the preserver and guardian of the truth – pillar and bulwark (1 Tim 3:15)
- The interpretation of the Scriptures has been given to the Church by Christ – 2 Peter 1:20-21
- The Church received from Christ, her head, the fullness of divine authority on earth.
- The word of God purifies, sanctifies and saves us

1. The Church is the Door to Life because it contains the fullness of the truth and all that pertains to the truth.
 - a. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles to guide them into all the truth – Jn. 16.13

- b. This is a gift to the Church
 - i. This gift allows all of us to draw from the church the “words of eternal life” as St. Peter understand
 - ii. This Word cleanses and purifies and saves us
 - c. There is no other place, no other institution which contains this truth
 - i. It is the truth of the Apostolic Faith given to and entrusted to the Church.
 - ii. This is why in The Creed we confess the Church to be “Apostolic” – it is a very important characteristic of our Church
 - 1. We can trace our lineage back to Jesus’ apostles who were witnesses of all He did and said, and were present at the descent of the Holy Spirit.
 - d. This is the complete truth – note the words “...will guide you into ALL the truth.
 - i. We don’t just confess to have the truth, but ALL of it completely
 - 1. This is part of the meaning of the word “catholic” in the Creed
 - 2. While some faiths/institutions/creeds will contain some or part of the truth as revealed by God, no one, no institution, no organization contains the fullness of the truth except the church.
 - e. Jesus calls Himself “The Way, the Truth and the Life”
 - i. Because He is the Truth, His Body, the Church, contains the Truth.
 - f. St. Theophan the Recluse – “the Church possesses the living God...She truly experiences His presence, and therefore the Church is His House...everything in the Church is of Truth: true confession of faith, true sacraments, true gifts of grace, true divine life imparted to those who live by God, true divine miracles and power: all becomes Truth within the Church.”
2. The Church is the Door to Life because it is the preserver and guardian of the truth
- a. 1 Timothy 3:15 – the household of God “...is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.
 - i. What does the word pillar signify? – The Church supports/contains the truth. What does the word bulwark mean? Bulwark is a defensive barrier set against something. In this case it means that the church defends the truth, is Herself its protector.
 - ii. What does the Church defend the Truth against? Worldly wisdom and anything that would pull us away from the truth that saves us – the Apostolic Faith that saves us.
 - b. We should not look elsewhere for the truth, but should “flee” to the Church and be brought up and nourished by Her – with the Lord’s Scriptures.
 - i. We often look to other places when the Church confronts us with a truth that we disagree with or one that is difficult to fulfill
 - ii. There have always been many competing “truths” in the world and the Church has always had to proclaim the Truth and defend it.
3. The Church is the Door to Life because it has been given the power to interpret the Scriptures, which is the very word of God, the words of eternal life.
- a. The source of truth in both the Scriptures and in the Church is the one Holy Spirit

- i. Our knowledge of that truth is provided both by the Scriptures and by the Church.
 - b. 2 Peter 1:20-21 – “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
 - i. The truth has been deposited in the Church by God and it is by His Holy Spirit that that truth has been both spoken and written
 - ii. In order for the words of eternal life to lead us to eternal life they must be “translated”/interpreted properly
 - 1. We cannot interpret on our own.
 - 2. Our own subjective understanding can err, be deceived or simply exercise wrong judgement.
 - iii. The Church “measures” interpretation against the entirety of Scripture and Tradition in order to test the correctness of interpretation
 - c. We believe that our Orthodox Church of today is the very same Church that was founded by Jesus Christ and His Apostles
 - i. This includes our basic beliefs and the truths of God’s revelation
 - 1. The Church never distorts, deforms, replaces, takes away from or adds to the Truth as it was once revealed to Christ’s Apostles
 - 2. Contemporary/modern society in every day and age has put pressure on the Church to change/alter both its teaching and its interpretation of the word of God, but the church remains that “bulwark” against the world and its teaching.
 - d. The Church has remained the guide for us on matters of piety and the moral life.
 - i. It is in and through the Church that her faithful members inherit the Kingdom of God. Not outside the Church, not on our own, but from within the Church that we will inherit eternal life.
4. The Church is the Door to Life because it received from Christ, her head, the fullness of divine authority on earth.
- a. This authority is linked to helping the body of the faithful “come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto perfect manhood, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). – In other words this authority is given to help the faithful mature in Christ.
 - i. This authority was not given simply to tell people what to do. It was given in order that the Church would “grow into the House of God by the Spirit” (Eph 2.22)
 - ii. To achieve this goal of maturity, Christ Himself gave the means to attain salvation.
 - 1. He entrusted to the Church His divine teaching, and He gave authority to the Apostles to teach, baptize, and to do all that is necessary for others to obtain salvation (Mt. 28.16-20; Eph 4:11-13)
 - 2. He established the sacrament of the Eucharist (Lk. 22.19)

3. He granted the Apostles authority to “bind and loose” (Mt 16.19; 18:18), to baptize (Mt.28.19) and to “feed” the Church (Acts 20.28; Jn 21.15-17).
- b. The Apostles were given authority by Christ, and this authority has been passed down through generations of hierarchs through Apostolic Succession.
 - i. As the “Builders/stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4.1) the Apostles were called to judge the Church (1 Tim 5:21-22), to keep order (1 Tim 3:15; Titus 1.5) and to reach sound doctrine (Titus 2.1)
- c. Obtaining salvation, the Kingdom of God eternally is only possible through the gifts Christ gave the Church, what He entrusted to the Church. However, our Lord continues to guide the Church through the power and operation of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9)
 - i. All the gifts given to the Church are not salvific/saving unless we have the Spirit of Christ.
- d. Christ remains the head of the Church and He Himself is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (Jn 14.6)
 - i. The way this is manifested in the Church is this: In the Church’s hierarch Christ Himself is present as the Way. In the confession of faith He is present as the Truth. And in the sacraments, He becomes the source of Life.

Evening Church Service: Moleben to St. Nectarios

Sermon:

- The authority given to the Church on earth is divine authority, but it must be used to bring others to the Kingdom of Heaven. Show how St. Nectarios did this in his life and link it with the Gospel about following the one Good Shepherd, and he being a shepherd of the flock
- Talk about the role of Bishop as a shepherd of the flock of Christ
- Talk about Christ as the Door to the Sheepfold and therefore His Church becomes the Door to the Sheepfold, the Door to Life.

Evening Prayers:

- What does Christ mean when He says the words, “You will answer for every empty word you speak?” The empty word is the word that is not full of love, full of Christ Himself
- Read or talk about James 3:1-12 – James recognized how “the tongue is a fire” and can set “ablaze” our passions. Talk about what it means to have godly speech and to “bridle our tongue.”
- Adam and Eve resisted and rebelled against God’s authority – this didn’t go well for them or us. We must always submit ourselves to God in obedience and love – James 4:7, and that means to His Church.

Cabin Talk:

- Christ came with the “words of eternal life”. What does it mean to let our talk/speech be full of life? How and why is our speech/talk not full of life

- What does it mean to gossip and why is it sinful?
 - It does not build up, it tears down. We are called to build up the Body of Christ.
 - It is not full of love. Christ's speech (even when He was angry) was full of love. He always spoke the "truth in love"
 - What were the meanest words you've ever said or heard (keep it clean)? Were they directed at you? How did they make you feel?

Wednesday

The Church is the Door to Life:
The Water of Eternal Life

Goal: To understand what Jesus meant when He said, "...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn 4:14). To better understand the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation and what they mean in our lives.

Morning Prayers:

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

Epistle: Romans 6:3-11

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Morning Sermon:

- What is the "water" that Jesus was referring to in today's Gospel: The Holy Spirit. Talk about the acquisition of the Holy Spirit and the place of the Spirit in our lives.
- Talk about the power and operation of God's Holy Spirit within the Church and how it is by that power and operation that we are able to do everything within the Church: from prayer to sacraments, from iconography to understanding the Gospel...
- Baptism – the Sacrament of Initiation. What does our Church understand Baptism to be? What has baptism given to us or what has become of us in baptism?
- Chrismation – the Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. What does our Church understand Chrismation to be? What has been given to us in Chrismation?

Faith Enrichment:

Main Points:

- Christ Himself has given His Church the "Water of Life" which is the Holy Spirit
- The Spirit is constantly and uninterruptedly acting in the sacraments of the Church
- Baptism is the Sacrament of Initiation into the Church, the Kingdom of God on earth. In it we are united to Christ through water and the Holy Spirit.
- Chrismation is the sacrament of the "seal" of the Holy Spirit, that seals and anoints us in our hearts (cf. 2 Cor 1.21) with God's Spirit, His divine grace. We are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4.30).

1. The Church is the Door to Life because Christ Himself has given His Church the "Water of Life" which is the Holy Spirit.

- a. “And when Jesus had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” – John 20.22 “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Lk.24.49) And then “...He said, ‘you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 1.5). And then “...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...” (Acts 1.8) And then “...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2.4)
 - i. Jesus had promised to send upon His Apostles and Disciples the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. When the Holy Spirit was sent and did descend upon the Apostles, the message of the Gospel, the word of life, the saving message of the Kingdom of God began to be preached by them.
 - b. The Holy Spirit is the “living water” Jesus refers to in Jn. 4.10 and is given to bring us to His Kingdom.
 - i. “...the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (Jn. 4.14)
 - c. Pentecost was the day when new life, the power of God, entered the world; when the source of divine life (i.e. the Kingdom of God) found its continuation in the world
 - i. At the moment of Pentecost the promise of Christ to build His Church on earth, as the Kingdom of God not of this world, became a reality
 - ii. At Pentecost, the nucleus of the Church – a little flock of 120 believers in Jesus Christ – became the seed from which grew new life for the salvation of the whole world.
 - iii. This was the sign, the seal of Christ’s victory and glory. The Spirit revealed Himself as the “other Comforter” dwelling in the Apostles to bear witness to the Son of God, to reveal His glory, and to seal His victory
 1. “...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts. 1.8)
2. The Church is the Door to Life because The Spirit is constantly and uninterruptedly acting in the sacraments of the Church.
 - a. We ask God to send His Holy Spirit upon our gifts of bread and wine to transform them into the very Body and Blood of Christ. We ask God to sanctify the waters of Baptism by the Power of His Holy Spirit. Through the Sacrament of Chrismation the Church communicates the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the sprinkling of Holy Water and by the power of the Holy Spirit (as we often say) we bless a variety of liturgical items. By the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the laying on of hands, our sins are forgiven in the Sacrament of Confession/Penance, etc.
 - b. The whole fullness of life in the Church is Sacramental because of the Spirit’s constant operation – by this action the true divine nature of the Church is revealed.

- i. Acts 2 – All about the Promise of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon all flesh and its fulfillment through the Apostles
 - 1. Note that the Spirit is not communicated other than through the Apostles – especially laying on of hands (Acts 8:15)
 - 2. Christ established the Church by the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and from it came Christianity, not vice-versa.
 - c. Not even the Apostles could act without the gift of the Holy Spirit
 - i. “...but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Lk 1.49)
 - ii. In order for the Church to be the Door to Life, the entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Spirit needs to work/operate in every part of it.
 - iii. “By this we know that we abide in Him and he in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit.” (1 John 4:13)
 - iv. We can’t even pray to God without the Spirit – Rom 8.26-27
 - d. As the body of Christ, the living organism animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church is infallible.
- 3. Baptism is the Sacrament of Initiation into the Church, the Kingdom of God on earth. In it we are united to Christ through water and the Holy Spirit.
 - a. “...as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Hymn at baptisms and certain liturgies during year.
 - i. Genuine unity with Christ in Baptism
 - 1. “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a Resurrection like His.” – Rom 6.5)
 - 2. This unity gives us life – we are made alive in Christ – “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” – Rom 6.11. And again “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” – Rom 6.8
 - 3. The Church is the Door to Life – we enter that life, the life of the Kingdom, already here and now, through Baptism – the question becomes whether or not we will live like we have this new life.
 - b. We stay united to Christ by the way we live after Baptism
 - i. We are called to make Christ our King and our God
 - 1. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” – (Rom 6.12)
 - 2. Christ is meant to be our King – He is meant to rule/reign in and through us, not sin. We profess this during our Baptism.
 - 3. We are meant to be “passionate” only about Christ. Sin in all its forms makes us slaves of its passions – “...we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”
 - c. By giving ourselves/dedicating ourselves/commending ourselves and one another to God each day we stay united to Him
 - i. Recall how we say this during Church services – “Let us commend ourselves, and one another and our whole lives to Christ our God. This means we give ourselves to God everyday.

- ii. “Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.” – Rom 6.13
 - 1. This must happen everyday so that we stay united to Christ
 - d. Baptism unites us to Christ because it is for “the remission of sins” – reference The Creed
 - i. Baptism removes/remits our sins so that we can be united to Christ
 - 1. Where Christ is there can be no sin and vice versa
 - 2. “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace.” (Rom 6.14) We cannot be united to Christ and to sin – we cannot serve two masters
4. Chrismation is the sacrament of the “seal” of the Holy Spirit, that seals and anoints us in our hearts (cf. 2 Cor 1.21) with God’s Spirit, His divine grace. We are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4.30)
- a. In Baptism we are united to Christ. In Chrismation we are given the power to live that way, to maintain that unity and deepen it.
 - i. We are called to live according to the Spirit, not according to our own desires
 - ii. “...who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom 8.4)
 - b. Unity with Christ depends on what we set our minds on – “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” – Rom 8.5
 - i. The expression “Make up your mind” is appropriate here. We have to make up our minds whether to live according to the Spirit or not. We can’t live according to the desires and pleasures of the flesh AND according to the Spirit.
 - c. Without the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we cannot be united to Christ, and therefore cannot enter life, the Kingdom of God on earth or in Heaven.
 - i. “Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him...If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you.” – Rom 8.9-11a
 - ii. The point of this passage – Without God’s Spirit in us, Christ is not and cannot be our King – we cannot live the Baptized life. We therefore cannot enter real life, genuine life in the Kingdom on earth or in heaven. “...if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” – Rom 8.13
 - d. The seal is the sign that we are owned by and are servants of Christ
 - i. Can talk about how Roman soldiers were “sealed”/stamped to show they were servants/soldiers of the emperor
 - ii. The seal is the sign that we have been given through Holy Chrism the Holy Spirit as a “gift”
 - 1. “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit”

2. Can talk about how we add our “Amen” to this, welcoming into the Church the newest soldier of Christ.
- e. Not only are we united to Christ through Baptism, but we become His children, His sons and daughters if we live by His Spirit. And as God’s children we are able to inherit all that Christ (the Son) has inherited, that is the Kingdom of Heaven – we are able to enter into life.
 - i. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” – Rom 8.14
 - ii. This adoption happens when we are baptized, but is fulfilled in our life and to the Kingdom if we live by the Spirit.
 1. “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship.”
 - a. We were not Chrismated to fall back into sin, but we have received the spirit of sonship to live as children of God enjoying the blessings and goodness of our Heavenly Father
- f. By the Spirit we are able to call on God as our Father.
 - i. “When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.
 1. We cannot call on God as Father without the Spirit.
 2. We are Our Father’s children and the only way we can call Him “Abba, Father” is by being His Holy children – the two are linked.
 3. Being adopted children of God means that we like the Son of God must suffer in order to be glorified. We suffer when we resist sin. We suffer as we live the life of the Spirit, but we are promised the same glory as the Son of God in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- g. Ultimately we are called to share the same “fate” as Christ – enter into Life – we do this through the Church as He has given us to.
 - i. This is part of the meaning of Eph 4.30 – “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” -- we are kept safe by God’s Spirit, if we live by the Spirit, in order that we might be redeemed/have life with our Father in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Evening Church Service: Moleben to the Cross

Sermon:

- Link Baptism with the Cross and our death and Resurrection with Christ
- The Church is the Door to Life – talk about the doors of the Church on Holy Saturday and Pascha – they remain closed and all is dark until the sign of the Cross is placed on them – through the Cross we enter Life
- Talk about co-suffering with Christ, in order to be truly God’s children – we must suffer with Him in order to be glorified with Him (Rom 8.17)
- Christ crying out from the Cross “Father, forgive them...” and “Father, into your hands...” And in the Garden of Gethsemane “Father if thou art willing...” -- Christ

asked for the suffering of the Cross to be removed from Him, but then submitted (gave up His Kingship) to His Father's will. Still from the Cross He asked His Father to forgive them. We too have the same "power" to submit to God as our King, to live and call out to Him by the Spirit. Only possible through Baptism and Chrismation.

Evening Prayers:

- Meditation on the fruit of the Holy Spirit: Gal 5.22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."
- Commending ourselves to God as we go to sleep – the last thing we do – "sealed" even at night
- The Church is the Door to Life – the most important steps we take are in and out of the Church Building.
- In order to call God "Our Father" we must be holy, show ourselves to be holy children of our Heavenly Father.

Cabin Talk:

- How can we endure suffering and why has God allowed it in our lives? Why did Christ suffer?
- What does it mean to have peace which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit? How can you have peace in the midst of family crisis, sickness, death? Where does it come from? How do we acquire it?
- Story of the Waters of Marah – Exodus 15:22-27 – Tell or read story. Link the wood used to the Wood of the Cross. God provides us what we need, but we must "...give heed to His commandments and keep all His statutes..." (Ex.15.26)
- Story of the Passage through the Red Sea – Exodus 14 --Tell or read story. Link going through the waters of the Red Sea (passing from death to life) to the waters of Baptism (must go into and out of the waters as sign of our death and Resurrection with Christ)

Thursday

The Church is the Door to Life:
The Food of Eternal Life

Goal: To understand what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna...and they died...I am the living bread...if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him...” (John 6:48-53ff) To understand what the Church’s teaching is about Communion and its importance in our life

Morning Prayers:

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 16

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 11:17-32

Gospel: John 6:47-58

Morning Sermon:

- The Bread of Life – the Eucharist—Christ’s own Body and Blood
- How difficult it was for those around Jesus to accept and believe these words (Jn 6.60, 66)
- Re-visit the Epistle – importance of preparing to eat the Lord’s supper. How do we prepare for Communion?

Faith Enrichment:

Main Points:

- Christ is Himself the Bread of Life, the food of immortality.
- Communion is the Very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
- The Eucharist, Communion, is the culminating moment in the life of the Church.
- In Communion we are truly and essentially united with our Lord Jesus Christ.
- We are called to work for this food of immortality, not for the food which perishes.

1. The Church is the Door to Life because Christ is Himself the Bread of Life, the food of immortality. -- Jn. 6:35, 48, 51
 - a. Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, is different than the manna God fed to the nation of Israel in the wilderness
 - i. The new bread gives life to the world (not jut Israel) – Jn. 6.33

- ii. If we eat this bread we will not hunger (Jesus is not talking about physical hunger) – Jn. 6.35
 - iii. If we eat this bread of life, we will not die – Jn. 6.50, 58

- 2. The Church is the Door to Life because in it we find Communion, the Very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. Jn. 6.51 – “...and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Mt. 26.26 – “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (see also Mk.14.22-24 and Lk.22.19-20)
 - b. 1 Cor.11:23-26 – Even St. Paul, though not at the Mystical Supper, had revealed to him by our Lord, that the bread and cup become the Lord’s Body and Blood.

- 3. The Eucharist, Communion, is the culminating moment in the life of the Church.
 - a. The Eucharist nourishes our spiritual and physical life (Jn.6.53, 1 Cor.11.29-30)
 - i. “...unto the healing of our soul and body...” – Pre-Communion Prayer
 - b. The Eucharist is communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and personal union with God Himself – John 6.56-57 and Pre-Communion Prayer: “...I pray, I may worthily receive for the remission of all my sins and for life everlasting.”
 - c. The Eucharist reveals the unity of the Church: “We, being many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor 10.17)
 - d. By the power and operation of the Holy Spirit the Eucharist is the Mystical Supper Jesus celebrated with His Apostles 2 millenia ago. It is the exact same meal, the Lord’s supper, because it is the same food of immortality.
 - e. “Receive the Body of Christ, taste the fountain of immortality. Alleluia.” – This is a call to our new life, our new life in the Kingdom already begun, where we partake of the Lord’s supper.

- 4. In Communion we are truly and essentially united with our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. Jn. 6.56 – “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”
 - i. By taking Christ into us He becomes a part of us and we a part of Him – not just physically but by the power of the Holy Spirit it bring us “to life” – “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.” (Jn.6.57) We are brought to life because of our unity with Christ
 - ii. This unity requires faith and cannot happen on our own, but by the power of God
 - b. Jn 6.29 – “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent.” And “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” (Jn 6.47) And Jn. 6.36 – “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.” And Jn 6.41 – “The Jews then murmured at Him because He said, ‘I am the bread

which came down from heaven.” (did not believe – only saw with their physical eyes saying “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know.”) And Jn. 6.64 “But there are some of you that do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe.”

- i. Even Christ’s own disciples had difficulty believing Christ’s words and that eating Christ’s Body and Blood was necessary in order to have eternal life. Many left Him at this point in His ministry – “After this many of His disciples drew back and not longer went about with Him.” (Jn 6.66)
 - c. This belief requires our faith AND Our Father’s blessing – “...no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (Jn 6.65) And “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...” (Jn 6.44) And “Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.” (Jn 6.45).
 - i. Every commitment to Christ made by us requires the grace of God to fulfill.
5. We are called to work for this Food of Immortality, not for the food which perishes.
- a. Our Lord clearly said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on Him has God the Father set His seal.” (Jn.6.27)
 - i. Working for this food is worth it – it leads us to eternal life
 - ii. Part of this work is believing in Christ
 1. Belief does not just happen but must be worked on and cultivated/grown
 2. God’s hand is required in order for us to believe
 - b. This work requires learning – learning in the mind and in the heart.
 - i. “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.” (Jn.6.45)

Evening Church Service: Vespers

Sermon:

- What are we working for this evening – preparation for the Eucharist/Communion
- How do we cultivate/grow faith?
- Pre-Communion Prayers, Fasting
- Place of Confession in our life

Cabin Talk:

- What do you do when you struggle to have faith or your faith is tested?
- Can you receive Communion if you are struggling to believe?
- How do you prepare to attend a special dinner? Link it to preparing for the Lord’s Supper.
- How much work/effort do we put into our life when it comes to drawing close to God.

Evening Sermon or Cabin Talk – Fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc.

Much of the following is taken from the works of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. There are quotes from his writings and then notes about those quotes. The following material is given simply as reference material.

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost was the day when new life, the power of God, entered into the world. At this moment the promise of Jesus Christ to build His Church on earth, as the Kingdom of God not of this world, became a reality. On Pentecost, the nucleus of the Church – a little flock of 120 believers in Jesus Christ – became the seed from which grew new life for the salvation of the whole world, through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

This was indeed the “baptism of the faithful” when the seal of Christ’s victory and glory, “the power from on high” entered into the world (Lk 24:49, Acts 1:4-5). As the source of divine life, the kingdom of God now found its continuation in the world with the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit revealed Himself as the “other Comforter” dwelling in the apostles to bear witness to the Son of God, to reveal His glory, and to seal His victory (Jn 15:26; 16:7, 14) In the person of the Holy Spirit, the glorified Christ returned to His flock, to abide with them forever. “I will not abandon you, I shall come to you!” (Jn 14:18; Mt. 28:20)

The road from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven will be open forever, thanks to the descent of the Holy Spirit, who is both in heaven and in the earthly Church of Christ (Acts 1:4-8, Lk 24:49)

It is by hearing the Word of God that divine grace opens man’s heart and mind to the knowledge of God: “For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12). Faith enters into a person who “has ears to hear,” for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 1:17). Thereby, “Christ may dwell in your heart by faith” (Eph 2:17). Subsequently, divine life enters into a person through baptism: “for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal 3:27), in whom dwells “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col.2.9). Christ imparts His own divine power to the newly baptized person, who is thereby born of God (Jn1.13). Divine grace, bestowed by the Holy Spirit, enters into the life of the newly baptized person through the sacrament of chrismation. This harkens back to the experience of the early Church: “They laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8.15). through chrismation God anoints us in Christ. He sealed us and gave us the Holy Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor 1. 21-22). God’s divine life enters the life of the new Christian in the fullest way through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The whole fullness of life in the Church is sacramental, because the Holy Spirit is constantly and uninterruptedly acting in the sacraments. It is by this action that the true, divine nature of the Church is realized.

In baptism, with its appeal to God for “a clear conscience” (1 Pet 3.21), the faithful are united to Christ by water and the Holy Spirit. They put on Christ, dying with him in his death and being raised with him in His Resurrection, in order to walk in “newness of

life” (Rom 6.3-4; Gal 3.27) through baptism a person is initiated into the divine-human life of the Church.

Chrismation is the sacrament of the “seal” of the Holy Spirit, that seals and anoints us in our hearts (cf. 2 Cor 1.21). WE are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4.30). We have an unction from the Holy (1 Jn 2.20) and we are made members of the royal priesthood and of the family of God.

Thus the Church – as the divine-human society of believers in Christ, the Son of the living God, being invisibly governed by Him and guided by the Holy Spirit, while being visibly governed by the hierarchy – is truly the source, the guardian, and the teacher of all God’s truth unto ages of ages.

From Christ she received authority to govern, sanctify, renew, regenerate and to purify the faithful through the Holy Sacraments. Church offers possibility to obtain sonship to God, by uniting them to the divine nature in the mystery of communion in the Body and Blood of the Son of God. She can do so, because she is governed by the authority of the Holy Spirit that comes to visible expression in the authority of the hierarchy.

The Church received from her head the fullness of divine authority on earth. To open or close the heavens (Mt. 16.19); authority to bind and to loose the sins of men (Mt. 18.18; Jn 20.22-23); authority to regenerate and to save the whole world (Jn 3.3, 16). As the body of Christ, the living organism animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church is infallible.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...” Acts 2:4

Because the Church is enlivened and animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church is the source and center of our divine-human life – beginning at baptism and coming to fulfillment at deification in the Kingdom of God. Through our human ignorance, pride and our desire to determine our own criteria as to what constitutes the religious and moral life we are led (by ourselves) to miss the significance of the Church for our salvation. Yet the Church of the living God is the “pillar and bulwark of truth” (1 Tim 3:15) which alone shows and prescribes the way and the means to piety and the moral life for us. It is in and through the Church that her faithful members inherit the Kingdom of God.

The Case for the Church Against a “Churchless Christianity”

What Does the Church Give or have that makes it the Door to Life – IT HAS THE TRUTH according to Irenaeus laid up in her by the Apostles. We need not seek among others the truth, which we can have for “free” from the Church. Not only HAS THE TRUTH, but it has in its fullness all that pertains to the truth.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Cor.12:27)

We can talk about Jesus all we want and we can learn about Him and believe in Him all we want, but we must understand the connection between Jesus and the Church. We must understand that the Church is the Body of Christ with Him as the head and we as the body. Within that “body” is contained all that we need. Within that “body” is contained all the fullness of the truth. Within that body is contained everything that we need to enter into eternal life. God has left within the Church the words of life, the food of life, the water of life. Within the Church He has left us the Holy Spirit, His Holy Spirit, to lead us into all the truth (Jn 16:13ff). This is an essential dimension to understanding the Church and its connection with Christ. It is by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, sent upon the Apostles at the first Pentecost, it is by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit that the Church is the Door to Life. Rather than being a building or an institution, it is a living, breathing reality, it is the Body of Christ. This is possible because Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit upon His Apostles and they have “communicated” that same Spirit to us through the laying on of hands down through the centuries.

The Church, we, are the Body of Christ and so we make up one community. We are not alone, the Church, but together we make up the Body of Christ. While each of us is an individual, God brings us together and by the power of His Holy Spirit, he makes us into His Body, with Him as the head, and we as the individual parts or members of His Body. We are a community, but more than that we are God’s community, His people, brought together, formed by Him, empowered by Him to do a particular work, the work of His people. That is in fact what the Greek word for church means. The word is “ecclesia” and it means the gathering of God’s people, gathered together to do His work.

The work we do culminates in us receiving the Body of Christ (Communion) to truly make us into the Church, to connect us all together, to link us all together in One Body, His Body, Christ’s Body, the Church. Christ’s own Body and Blood binds us all together invisibly. He becomes a part of us and we become a part of Him, and by becoming a part of Him we become a part of each other. All of us individually become His Body. This is only possible by the power and operation of God’s Holy Spirit living, breathing and active within the Church and from the Church going out into the world in and through us. During the Divine Liturgy we ask God to send down upon us and upon our gifts of bread and wine the Holy Spirit in order that He would transform (change) those gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We fully understand and practice Jesus’ command to “take and eat” this is my body and drink of this all of you, this is my blood (). And we further understand His command when He said, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink His Blood you have no life in you.” “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part in Me and I have no part in you.” As Christ’s Body, as the Church, we fully live out this commandment, which is as we call it in the Liturgy (“remembering therefore”) “the saving command” (“and all that has been done for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the Third Day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting at the Right Hand and the Second and Glorious coming, we offer unto You... Yours of Your own in behalf of all and for all.”) It is this saving command of our Lord’s that enables us to say and do all else that our Lord has commanded us. In other words, everything of the Church begins and ends with the Chalice. It flows from and flows back to the cup that we receive the Body of Christ from every Liturgy. In fact it is so important and central to us that St. Paul tells us to gather together often because it is the Lord’s meal and we need to receive from Him this special food of immortality.

Jesus says, “I am the bread of life...This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any

one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh..." (Jn 6.48ff) This was difficult for the people/the Jews to hear and they questioned how Jesus could say and do such a thing. Even some of His disciples after He said these words not longer followed him because they did not believe Him (Jn 6.64-66 – note that it says here that they did not believe). But Jesus went further than calling Himself the bread of life, He then said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day....**He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.**...this is the bread which came down from heaven...he who eats this bread will live for ever. (Jn.6.53ff)

We must know and understand that by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is the only way we become dwell with and in Christ and the only way He dwells in us. It is the only way we become a part of His Body and it is the only way we become His Body as the Church. Some might say that we can be Christians without this, but that is not true. It is here in the Scripture, and it is by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

As we said earlier, we ask God to send His Holy Spirit to accomplish this among us, and He does. And here in John's Gospel we hear Jesus say "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (Jn 6.63)

The Church is the Door to Life because it is Christ's Body. The Church is the Door to Life for us because we become members of Christ's Body through it. The Church is the Door to Life for us because only through it and from it do we get to "Receive the Body of Christ" and as we have learned, that Body is the food of immortality, it is the food of eternal life for us. Receiving it brings us into Communion with God, it bring us into Life, because it/He is the Bread of Life, and is Himself the Food of Immortality as we sing.

This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. (Gen.28.17)

Story of Jacobs ladder...When Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." How often are we a part of the Church and yet somehow forget that God is in this place or don't realize it as Jacob when he laid down to sleep did not realize that God was in the place where he had lain down to sleep. How often do we forget, or maybe we simply don't know, that God dwells with His people in the Church. But further, Jacob "was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place!" He expressed for us what it means to be in the presence of God, to be in His Holy Place, to be in His Church, long before there was even something called a Church. Jacob expresses what we need to feel, understand and see, that the Church is an awesome place, that is meant to provoke in us a sense of awe, admiration, fear, and reverence, so that we too would say, "How awesome is this place." Then he says "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Note: This could be part of the first days curriculum and it could be built on in the evening cabin talk. We could also use the reading from Genesis in the morning, at morning prayers or simply use the story as a way to illustrate our point during Faith Enrichment. Remember when this passage is read – during feastsdays for St. Mary

Perhaps the evening cabin talk or sermon could focus on St. Mary as an image of the Church, or of Jacob's ladder. She is the gate through which our Lord came into the world to us, and so she is an image of the Church and what the Church is called to be – the Body of Christ, or the vessel for Christ Himself, filled with the fullness of the presence of God.

There is no “churchless Christianity”. The truth and truths of our Faith, of Orthodoxy, were deposited/given to the Church, entrusted to the Church to be shared with the world, but also protected from those that would defile/speak against them. The Church for centuries has struggled to both give what God had entrusted to it, as well as to keep safe the truth/truths/teaching given by Christ to the Apostles. Christ did not entrust the message of the Gospel to just anyone, He chose particular people to teach and preach what He gave to them. These were the Apostles, the first bishops of the church, and after them all the bishops down to our own this day. The community He entrusted the Gospel with He made His Church and sanctified it because it is His Body. And more than that, it was the Church of Christ which gave birth and life to Christianity. There was no Christianity without the Church, and there is no Christianity without the Church. All the gifts, all the divine and saving gifts of our Savior Jesus Christ are manifested on earth within His Church (Mt.16.18)

It is not enough simply to accept by faith the saving acts of God. We must keep His commandments and in so doing participate in Christ's sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension. We must follow in His footsteps, to incorporate all the divine gifts of God in order to become holy as God the Father is holy and to (as St. Paul says) grow to the measure of the stature of Jesus Christ in spiritual perfection. The path of salvation, the road to the Kingdom of God lies only in and through the Church. But we must understand that the Church and Jesus Christ are not two separate realities.

While we may preserve a personal faith in our Lord, we must not lose sight of the fact that the only way to participate in the life of Christ and to follow Him into the Kingdom of Heaven is through His Holy Church – Christ is inseparably united to the Church, as its founder, foundation, and head. The Church is His body, the fullness of Christ, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). We often confuse or eliminate one side of this. Either we eliminate our personal faith and say that just the Church saves us, or we eliminate the Church and say just our faith saves us. But as Orthodox Christians we believe and know that both are required (both the Church and our faith) in order for us to follow Christ into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Note: We are called to imitate the life of Christ who Himself participated in and visited the Temple and Synagogues, the “churches” of His time among the Jews. He Himself participated in the community of faith that He was a part of as a man, and that His mother and foster-father were a part of. And then with His disciples He participated often in the Jerusalem Temples liturgical and festal celebrations. We are called in everyway to imitate Christ's life, to be His followers, His disciples. The community that He founded with His own Body and Blood, the community of the Church because He participated in His community and because He founded this one, we must be a part of in order to follow Him into the Kingdom. Again, Christ is inseparably united to the Church, as its founder, foundation and head...the Church being His Body, filling it with all the fullness of God.

Because the Church is enlivened and animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church is the source and center of our divine-human life – beginning at baptism and coming to fulfillment at deification in the Kingdom of God. Through our human ignorance, pride and our desire to determine our own criteria as to what constitutes the religious and moral life we are led (by ourselves) to miss the significance of the Church for our salvation. Yet the Church of the living God is the “pillar and bulwark of truth” (1 Tim 3:15) which alone shows and prescribes the way and the means to piety and the moral life for us. It is in and through the Church that her faithful members inherit the Kingdom of God.

The alternative is not according to the teaching of Christ, the teaching we find in Scripture or anywhere else within the life of the Church. The alternative is a very western/American notion of spirituality, that spirituality is an individual affair determined by me. I can decide whether I am spiritual or not, and can find my own way to the Kingdom. But again, this is not our teaching, not the teaching of the community that Christ Himself founded, from which grew Christianity. Christ established the Church and from it came Christianity, not vice-versa. The pathway to eternal life and communion with God (which is the most important task for Orthodox Christians) is made available in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic, Orthodox Church.

“This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (Gen 28:17)

The source of truth in both the Scriptures and in the Church is the one Holy Spirit. Our knowledge of that truth, then, is provided both by the Scriptures and by the Church. Interpretation of the Scriptures is not by our own subjective understanding which can err, be deceived or simply exercise wrong judgment. Remember Peter’s words, “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Pet 1.20)

The first and most significant dogma/doctrine of the Orthodox Church concerns the Holy Trinity. Two unique qualities of this doctrine: its absolute necessity for the existence of the Church and the absolute incomprehensibility of its essence. The Holy Trinity contains within itself the whole essence of Christian faith, as well as the foundation for all teaching of and about Jesus Christ. Absolute incomprehensibility insists that the essence of the Holy Trinity is revealed to us neither in the Old nor New Testament. We know He is our creator, but essence cannot be explained.

Just as we cannot speak of the essence of the Holy Trinity, which is the foundation of the Church, so we cannot speak of our knowledge of the essence of the Church, but we can perceive much about its nature through the revealed qualities of the Holy Trinity -- these qualities are reflected as qualities of the Church itself and are made known to us through the Holy Scriptures, Holy Tradition, and in the teachings of the Church Fathers.

The divine, mysterious life of the Church cannot be logically defined. To understand the reality of the Church and her life, one must actually participate in that life as a member of the living organism, which is the Body of Christ.

Note: This is an essential point to all of us because we often judge the things of Church without actually fully participating in them. We often judge each teaching without having lived them. We begin oftentimes not with faith, but with our own reasoning.

Rather than accepting with faith, we try to determine with our minds, and judge. From that point, we are not a part of the Church, but rather we attempt to be its judges, and we find its spiritual life unfulfilling, lacking in joy.

Further in this day and age there are groups trying to present false understandings of the Church, even going so far as to speak of the Church as deprived of grace or as being “impure”. The Church is being replaced by notions of a “Christian Society” or “Christianity-in-general”, which destroy the image of the Church as the source of the written Word of God. This is the gates of hell rising up against the Church, seeking to separate her from Jesus Christ and impeding her task of promoting salvation, a task entrusted to her by her Founder.

We believe that our Orthodox Church of today is the very same Church that was founded by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. In it we preserve and proclaim basic beliefs and truths of God’s revelation that must never be replaced or deformed, despite whatever pressures contemporary history may be bearing.

The Church is the Door to Life because the salvation of our soul (the most important task for us) depends on our Lord Jesus Christ granting to us the living power of divine grace with which we defeat the power of the Devil. The grace of God is given for our salvation, but not without our personal, complete, and free cooperation in the spiritual perfection of our life. Christ, having accomplished all He came to do, then sent the Holy Spirit into the world, in order that through His apostles He might establish His Kingdom on earth in the form of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (Jn.20.22; Acts 2:1-4). This Church is Christ’s Body, the possessor and repository of truth and the grace of God.

Note: It is the Spirit that established the Kingdom on earth, but the Spirit through the Apostles. The Spirit both constituted the Church (the community) and animated the Apostles to teach and reveal.

Our path to salvation: Enter the vineyard of God’s Kingdom in Christ, God’s Holy Church, becoming participants in God’s divine grace. We are purified and sanctified through the holy sacraments. Laboring spiritually BY FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD until our last breath, we inherit eternal life in divine unity with Christ, who is enthroned at the right hand of God the Father in His Kingdom.

And while the Church originated on earth at a specific time and in a certain place, the Church can trace her divine origin and foundation before time and the creation of the world, to the divine plan to conform fallen mankind to sonship in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Its origin derives directly from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, whose coming was predestined by the Father even before the foundation of the world. (1 Pet 1:19-20) – the lamb that was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times.

Sonship and holiness are inseparable – we cannot be children of God without being holy. We are Our Father’s children and the only way we can call Him “Abba, Father” is by being His holy children – the two are linked. Why are we worthy to become children of God? Because in Christ we have redemption through his blood and the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is the divine action which objectively embraces the whole world, while the forgiveness of sins resulting from the redemption is subjectively applied to every believer in

Christ. Once shed on the Cross, the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ mediates eternally between God and man (Heb 9:15). ON earth the redeeming work of Christ is continued by His Church.

Note: The point here is that while yes, God embraces the whole world and all people, He has called all people to His Church from which flows to each individual believer the forgiveness of sins through the redemptive blood of Christ. Of course God loves everyone, and of course He wants their salvation, but we in turn must become His adopted children and that only happens within the Body of Christ, with and in Christ Himself, who transformed His Apostles into His own Body.

As the head is exalted and glorified so is the Body. If Christ is exalted at the right hand of God, so is His Body, we the Church who are His Body.

This new life is received when we are grafted onto Christ in the sacrament of baptism. In Christ, by Christ and with Christ, we are united to God as members of His divine Body, the Church (Eph 1:23).

To understand the unity of the Church, it is necessary to know the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The life of the Church is centered on the second Person of the Trinity, on Christ the Savior, since His mission is “to gather together into one the children of God” (Jn 11:52). In fact, Christ’s own qualities are passed on to His Church: His love and life, His knowledge and peaceful joy, with the power of His Resurrection and ascension. Believing in Christ, we are incorporated through the sacraments and our spiritual life into His Body as members of His Church, and there we strive toward restoration of the “image and likeness of God”.

Note: All that Christ possessed He gave to His Church – we who desire the Kingdom of God need what He gave to His Church. We cannot have those things on our own, but in order for them to become saving we need them to be supplied and cultivated by the Church in us, in the context of the Body in which we work out that salvation.

The Church is the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. She is Christ’s Kingdom of divine grace, life, love, and divine unity, in which the faithful believers receive sanctifying grace, new life, and salvation in God’s eternal Kingdom. The Church is not simply “a society of those who believe in Christ.” She is the divinely founded institution in which Christ dwells in those who believe in Him, and in which He grants His boundless gifts to them. The Church, as the divine institution of sanctification, education, enlightenment, and protection, is truly our Mother. Moreover it is in the Church that Christ has a relationship with each one of us.

The greatest significance of the Church lies in the fact that God dwells within her upon the earth. In her essence the Church is the unity of God with men in Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ, animated and filled by the power and life of the Holy Spirit through Christ. The Church is the Kingdom of God for those who love God with their whole heart, their whole soul, and their whole mind with absolute faith. The mind of the Church is one with the mind of Christ, constantly contemplating the divine truth of God.

Note: But the Church is not that Kingdom, is not that life, is not saving for those who are not in it with absolute faith, not in it with everything of their being. Then it becomes merely a human institution in which we attempt to appear to be children of God, but in reality are far from Him. This is what happened with the Temple the Jews of

Christ's day. Far from being divine, the Temple become the den of thieves and robbers, who outwardly appeared holy, but inwardly were "full of dead men's bones" who were white-washed tombs.

The spiritual unity achieved with God in the Church is fully expressed in special ways: through the holy sacraments, teaching, church organization headed by the hierarchy, theology, services of sanctification, tighter with church art and culture. The entire sacramental life of the Church is directed toward the regeneration of man's spiritual and physical nature, in order that he might enter into the divine life of God.

The goal of His divine, pastoral activity is that there be one flock and one Shepherd in God's Kingdom, which is now known and experienced on earth in God's Holy Orthodox Church (Jn 10.16).

"My Kingdom is not of this world" (Jn18:36)

The Church is the divinely-founded society of salvation – His Kingdom. It is faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God – a firm, true and living faith revealed not by flesh and blood, or by earthly desires and impulses, but by God the Father – that according to Christ Himself, becomes the foundation of His Church on earth. By bestowing on Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, Christ presented the Church to the world as the divinely-founded society of salvation – His Kingdom.

The Church, as the Kingdom of the Spirit and of freedom, is open to all mankind, without national, political, ethnic or social limitations within time and space. Life in the Church flows from the head to the Body.

We affirm: The Church of Christ as the realization of the Kingdom of Christ on earth unites in Herself the freedom, holiness, love, truth, and life of Jesus Christ and all the qualities of the Kingdom of God, including power, justice, beauty, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Church as the instrument of Christ's Kingdom in the world, provides the opportunity to partake of the redeeming fruits of the saving work of Christ to all people, by offering them new life, sanctification, sacramental grace, and moral perfection in the Holy Spirit.

The road from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven will be open forever, thanks to the descent of the Holy Spirit, who is both in heaven and in the earthly Church of Christ (Acts 1:4-8, Lk 24:49)

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..." Acts 2:4

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost was the day when new life, the power of God, entered into the world. At this moment the promise of Jesus Christ to build His Church on earth, as the Kingdom of God not of this world, became a reality. On Pentecost, the nucleus of the Church – a little flock of 120 believers in Jesus Christ – became the seed from which grew new life for the salvation of the whole world, through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

This was indeed the "baptism of the faithful" when the seal of Christ's victory and glory, "the power from on high" entered into the world (Lk 24:49, Acts 1:4-5). As the source of divine life, the kingdom of God now found its continuation in the world with the

descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit revealed Himself as the “other Comforter” dwelling in the apostles to bear witness to the Son of God, to reveal His glory, and to seal His victory (Jn 15:26; 16:7, 14) In the person of the Holy Spirit, the glorified Christ returned to His flock, to abide with them forever. “I will not abandon you, I shall come to you!” (Jn 14:18; Mt. 28:20)

The Church of the Apostles was a living witness to the will of Christ for His Church, it did the will of the Church of Christ, it continued to reveal its Founder in the world, even though Christ had ascended.

In the writings of the Apostles we see the divine origins of the Church and the images of it – the Body comprises not only the living and departed but also the saints, the angels, and all past and future generations (Eph 1.21-23; 4:4-7, 11-12; 5.23, 32; Heb 12:22-24) Jesus is not only Founder but head of his body, the Church

Note: Behavior in the House of God – Tim 3:15 – commenting on this St. Theophan the Recluse says – “the Church possesses the living God...She truly experiences His presence, and therefore the Church is His House....everything in the Church is of Truth: true confession of faith, true sacraments, true gifts of grace, true divine life imparted to those who live by God, true divine miracles and power: all becomes Truth within the Church.”

For the faithful the goal of life in the Church is to attain unity of faith, to “come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto perfect manhood, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). In order to achieve this goal, Jesus Christ Himself gave the means through which to attain salvation. He entrusted to the Church His divine teaching, and He gave authority to the apostles to teach, baptize, and to do all that is necessary for others to obtain salvation (Mt. 28:16-20; Eph 4:11-13) He Himself established the sacrament of the Eucharist (Lk 22.19). He granted the apostles authority to “bind and loose (Jn.22-23), to baptize (Mt 28.19) and to “feed” the Church (Acts 20.28; Jn 21.15-17), in order that she “grow into the House of God by the Spirit” (Eph 2.22)

As the “Builders/stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4.1) the apostles were to judge the Church (1 Tim 5.21-22), to keep order (1 Tim 3:15; Titus 1.5) and to reach sound doctrine (Titus 2.1).

Note: The Church is the door to life because it was given the means through which to obtain salvation by Christ Himself. The goal of the faithful is only possible through the gifts Christ gave the Church, what He entrusted to the Church.

But our Lord himself invisibly holds the rudder of the Church in His hands, animating the Church by His Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9).

Christ is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14.6), but how this gets manifested in the Church is this: In the Church’s hierarchy Christ Himself is present as the way. In the confession of faith He is present as the truth. And in the sacraments, He becomes the source of Life. The unity of these three corresponds to the Kingdom of God, whose ruler is our Lord Jesus Christ.

“I believe...in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

The Church takes on the qualities of its head, Jesus Christ. She is one because she rests on the one cornerstone (Eph 2.20). She is holy because she is constantly being built into a holy

temple by the Spirit (Eph 2.21-22). The Church is catholic, for she is the fullness of Christ, embracing all nations and all times (Eph 2.14,20). And the Church is apostolic, since she is built on the holy apostles (Eph 2.20). – these are the essential qualities of the Church.

Our Lord Jesus Christ granted His divine truth and life, not to any individual member of His body, but to the whole Church acting in unity. This unity is a unit in love, animated and preserved by the life that proceeds from the head to the body (Eph 4.2-6; Col 2.19).

The Church, as the body of Christ, is the divinely instituted community of the faithful on earth (Mt. 16.18; 18:20) acting in the world. She fulfills her task, preserving the unity and holiness of her divine life as the gift to the Holy Trinity. There she safeguards and protects the teaching of Jesus Christ and passes His truth, the truth of faith, to future generations. There, too, she preserves the gifts of divine grace in the form of sacraments. All this she does through the apostolic succession of hierarchy, for the moral perfection and salvation of the faithful in the Kingdom of God.

Note: The Church is the door to life because she fulfills this divine vocation through its teaching, faith and sacraments.

“...the church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15)

Church is the K of God because she inherited the divine fullness of her founder and head, and has received the Holy Spirit. Also because the goal and destiny which is hers to bring all humans into the heavenly abode of God.

The Church received from her head the fullness of divine authority on earth. To open or close the heavens (Mt. 16.19); authority to bind and to loose the sins of men (Mt. 18.18; Jn 20.22-23); authority to regenerate and to save the whole world (Jn 3.3, 16). As the body of Christ, the living organism animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church is infallible.

From Christ she received authority to govern, sanctify, renew, regenerate and to purify the faithful through the Holy Sacraments. Church offers possibility to obtain sonship to God, by uniting them to the divine nature in the mystery of communion in the Body and Blood of the Son of God. She can do so, because she is governed by the authority of the Holy Spirit that comes to visible expression in the authority of the hierarchy.

Because she participates in His divine nature the Church also inherits Christ's divine authority, for “Where I am, there you may be also (Jn.14.3). Having the Spirit of God the Church has the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2.12, 16) and thus is infallible by her very nature. Authority used against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (Eph 6.12). It is final judge in worldly matters, but also the merciful and loving mother, who forgives her children “seventy times seven” (Mt.18.22).

Human effort is necessary, together with the work of the Holy Spirit, in order to express the whole truth within the Church. (In order for Church to be truly authoritative it must gather with Christ (Lk 11.23)

The central position of the Church is as the preserver and guardian of truth – clearly expressed in Scripture as “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Same affirmation expressed in Eph 1.23 the Church is “the fullness of Christ” commissioned to continue His work in the world while being preserved “holy and without blemish” (Eph 5.27)

St. Irenaeus – Church as the depository of truth, as the interpreter of the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition, and as the guardian and protector of truth. The truth is to be found nowhere else but in the Catholic church, the sole depository of the apostolic faith: “since the apostles deposited into the treasury of the Church all things pertaining to the truth, so now every man can draw from the Church the water of life, for the Church is the entrance into life.”

And though in many different places and countries she is still the preserver of the truth. The Church received from the apostles and their successors the true faith. With apostolic succession, the episcopate has received from God “the certain gift of truth”. (St. Irenaeus) “The pillar and the foundation” of the Church is the Gospel and the Spirit of life. The Church is the interpreter of truth, just as she is the road that leads to salvation. The faithful should avoid false teaching by “fleeing to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord’s Scriptures. For the Church has been planted as paradise in the world...For the Holy Spirit dwelling in man, becomes the head of man, for through Him (the Spirit) we see, and hear and speak – St. Irenaeus

Note: Must flee to the Church because protects us from false teaching.

Thus the Church – as the divine-human society of believers in Christ, the Son of the living God, being invisibly governed by Him and guided by the Holy Spirit, while being visibly governed by the hierarchy – is truly the source, the guardian, and the teacher of all God’s truth unto ages of ages.

As teacher of truth, The Church proclaims:

- 1. The Church is the source, the guardian and the interpreter of the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, which equal each other in authority (2 Thess 2:15; Jn 16:13)**
- 2. The dogmatic theology of the Orthodox Church is the science which in systematic order reveals to the world the dogmas or doctrines related to all aspects of God’s providence in the world. Absolute authority for all members of the Church.**
- 3. Orthodox moral theology is the science which, again in systematic order, explains the teachings relating to the moral life of man, as that life is to be lived in accordance with God’s laws and commandments in harmony with His will.**

Both moral and dogmatic theology lead to salvation. Dogma is objective revelation of God’s truth, His commandments and action. Moral teaches about our acceptance of truth and our response to God’s will. – that involves accepting and fulfilling the moral commandments of God, as the living path to salvation.

Christ is the absolute criterion in the personal and social moral life of every Christian. Mary and the saints also serve as guiding lights when in doubt or confusion. Moral theology is not moral philosophy which is based on purely human knowledge.

It is by hearing the Word of God that divine grace opens man’s heart and mind to the knowledge of God: “For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12). Faith enters into a person who “has ears to hear,” for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 1:17). Thereby, “Christ may dwell in your heart by faith” (Eph 2:17). Subsequently, divine life enters into a person through baptism: “for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal 3:27), in whom dwells “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col.2:9). Christ imparts His own divine power to the newly baptized

person, who is thereby born of God (Jn1.13). Divine grace, bestowed by the Holy Spirit, enters into the life of the newly baptized person through the sacrament of chrismation. This harkens back to the experience of the early Church: "They laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8.15). through chrismation God anoints us in Christ. He sealed us and gave us the Holy Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor 1. 21-22). God's divine life enters the life of the new Christian in the fullest way through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The whole fullness of life in the Church is sacramental, because the Holy Spirit is constantly and uninterruptedly acting in the sacraments. It is by this action that the true, divine nature of the Church is realized.

In baptism, with its appeal to God for "a clear conscience" (1 Pet 3.21), the faithful are united to Christ by water and the Holy Spirit. They put on Christ, dying with him in his death and being raised with him in His Resurrection, in order to walk in "newness of life" (Rom 6.3-4; Gal 3.27) through baptism a person is initiated into the divine-human life of the Church.

Chrismation is the sacrament of the "seal" of the Holy Spirit, that seals and anoints us in our hearts (cf. 2 Cor 1.21). We are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4.30). We have an unction from the Holy (1 Jn 2.20) and we are made members of the royal priesthood and of the family of God.

In the eucharist, which is the culminating moment in the life of the Church, we are truly and essentially united with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Jn6.56). The eucharist nourishes our spiritual and physical life (Jn 6.53). In this sacrament, Jesus Christ appears as the cornerstone of our salvation. True life in Christ is granted to us only within the Church. The eucharist is the sacrament of communion in the body and blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and personal union with God Himself (Jn 6.56-57) The unity of the Church is likewise manifested in the eucharist: "We, being many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10.17).

St. John of Kronstadt: "Partaking daily of communion in the most holy and life-giving sacrament, I always felt its life-giving power for my soul and body, felt its victory over my sinfulness and death. I became full of joy and gratitude toward God for permitting me to be communicant of such a great and holy sacrament. I contemplated His mystery: Here is He who is before all and by whom all things exist, even the entire universe, for He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

The Church requires holiness of life from her members in the name of the Holy Trinity. (1 Thess 4.7)

For Orthodox Christians, the first and most essential task is to remain faithful to all that God has granted us within the Church, through our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Rooted in and fortified by the sacramental mysteries of the Church, all Orthodox Christians are to go out into the world to undertake God's mission. – make full use of their personal talents and gifts, bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

Do we really need the Church and all its complicated dogmas, canons, services, etc. The answer is an emphatic yes from our perspective. Yes because the Church is divine in its origin and in order to be saved, in order to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we must journey within His Body, the Church He has given us. By participation in the Body of Christ, a believer experiences the nourishment of the Holy Spirit and shares in the Divine Life...which is eternal life for us. The Church is the Kingdom of God in our midst and in order to be a citizen of the Kingdom to come we must be citizens in the Kingdom now. We will not be able to claim we are citizens of God's Kingdom in Heaven, if we do not claim citizenship in the Kingdom of God on earth. He has given the Church to us as a gift, the Kingdom of God come but not fully yet. Jesus came bringing a Kingdom with Him, He opened again the gates to that Kingdom so that we could enter, and He left us with the beginning of that Kingdom here, so that experiencing it, entering it, we would hunger for it there. He has even given us a taste, a foretaste of its sweetness, in His own Body and Blood which not only nourish us by and with the Holy Spirit, but also instill in us a craving for more, a craving for an eternity fed by and enriched by God's Holy Spirit. The Church as the Kingdom of God on earth, the Church as God's Kingdom brought to us in the person of Jesus Christ, is the community in which we work out our salvation, is the community in which we discover the sweetness, beauty and truth of our lives, is the community in which we become who we were created to be by our Lord. The Church far from simply being a set of dogmas, rules, canons, teachings, services, is God's Kingdom already here in which we can participate and in which we can move towards, grow towards, and live towards a place in God's Kingdom forever.

The Church is the Door of/to Life – Jesus Christ is the Door of the Sheepfold, He is the Good Shepherd of the Sheep

Maybe: The Church has the Food of Life
The Church has the Water of Life
The Church has the Words of Life

Each Day you would connect these three to the Church as the Door of/to Life

The first day you would talk of Church as the Door to Life and then develop that theme in the next 3 days and what it means for us in these 3.

Spend time with how is Church the Body of Christ. This culminates with "Receive the Body of Christ...taste the fountain of immortality." Eventually must be discussion of immortal life vs. life on earth. What is immortality. How do you establish the authenticity of the Church. We worship Christ, not the Church. God is a person.

Some discussion of individuality vs. community. Can talk about Jesus all we want, but must link Jesus with Church if topic is The Church is the Door to Life. You are individually members of the Body – St. Paul. Yes we are individuals, but individuals who are members of a Body and therefore we are a community.

Parts have different functions like team members have different function.
Spend time with meaning of life – why created, for what purpose

The Church has the Food of Life – Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life

Seeming sweetness of the apple, but it turned bitter. Why? Didn't lead to life, led to death, because it was not with God, it was an attempt at life without God

Jn. 6.48 – “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna...and they died...I am the living bread...if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Note: Can talk about story of manna in wilderness – could be cabin talk

Jn.6.53 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him...”

We sing “Receive the Body of Christ” -- who gives that Body? The answer is the Church. How and why does that Body engender life. “Receive the Body of Christ, taste the Fountain of Immortality”. Everything culminates and flows from chalice.

The Church has the Water of Life – the Life-giving Water – Jesus gives us the Water of Life, has the water of life – it is the Spirit welling up in us.

The Bitter waters of Marah – how were they changed – by the wood Moses through in at the command of God

Link with Cross in Blessing of Waters at Theophany – evening talk

Water is the Spirit – St. Seraphim of Sarov – “Acquisition of the Holy Spirit” – can teach one night about St. Seraphim of Sarov – read a book to youngsters on his life.

Link with words of Christ – He who drinks this water will thirst again, he who drinks the water that I shall give will never thirst again...these waters will well up in him unto eternal life – this is the link with the Holy Spirit

Discussion of Baptism and Chrismation – link between the two.

Church is the Door to Life because God has given it by His grace to give/communicate the Holy Spirit to each person. Not a power, but a responsibility to give what God has given it – Himself. Go from Jesus (Resurrection) to Holy Spirit (Pentecost), the **giving** of the Holy Spirit – it is the Spirit who reigns in the Church. How is the Church the Body of Christ – because the Spirit makes it that way. It is the Holy Spirit who is referred to as the Giver of Life, and therefore communicates The Life who is Christ – this is how the Church distributes that Life, ie. By the power of the Holy Spirit.

How do we communicate the Holy Spirit? Because God has given us the power to, and yet the Holy Spirit is the “Giver of Life” and yet God has given us the power to communicate it. Recall Exodus reading at Pentecost where Eldad and Medad begin to prophesy in the Camp and Joshua wants to stop them but Moses says “would that all the people would prophesy.”

Uncontrollable nature of the Holy Spirit. There was the official 70 who were appointed/selected and yet the Spirit goes where it wills.

The Church has the Words of Life – this links teaching, truth, light

Jn. 6.68 – “Simon peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Jn. 6.63 – “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Note: This must be linked with the commandments – “Your commandments are a light upon the earth.

Note: The crowd was astonished at His teaching. Jesus taught as one who had authority and not as the scribes – find this verse. The scribes had authority, did they not? And yet the people felt Jesus had an authority that they did not even though He had no official position. His words carried more weight, more influence, they impacted people more, reached their hearts more. Why? Yes, it was from the mouth of the Son of God, but it wasn’t some magical power, where God was influencing the people by might or some power, but rather, I think it was that Jesus Himself knew the truth of the words – as a man He believed completely and trusted His Father, He Himself was that Truth, He lived that truth not just taught it, and therefore the people themselves knew and were convinced to believe by the strength and power of the words and of Jesus’ own life. He lived the words before they were ever spoken and so they carried weight.

Note: This section must talk about truth, that it is only in the Church that we find the truth, that it is the guardian and teacher of the truth. As Irenaeus himself says, it is the door to life, because it contains the truth and all that pertains to the truth.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, having given authority to the disciples “to observe all things which I have commanded you to do,” also promised to be with them “until the end of the world” (Mt.28:20)

Note: This goes with “If you would enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt. 19:17) The Lord told us to observe/do/keep all that he commanded us.

The Church has the Teaching of Life

The Church has the Light of Life – Christ is the Light of Life

The Church has the Treasure of Life

Because in the Church has been laid up by the Apostles all that pertains to the truth, so that whoever seeks, may receive from her the food of life.

In the Church is a treasure – the treasure of life – the treasure buried in the field – Gospel narrative of Kingdom as a treasure buried in a field and selling all and buying that field (the Kingdom of God) – Mt. 13.44. Gospel narrative about the pearl of great price – Mt.13.45

What Does the Church Give or have that makes it the Door to Life – IT HAS THE TRUTH according to Irenaeus laid up in her by the Apostles. We need not seek among others the truth, which we can have for “free” from the Church. Not only HAS THE TRUTH, but it has in its fullness all that pertains to the truth.

Included in that truth would be the truth about how to live life, what life is, what to do to obtain life, what life we are “destined” for.

Can talk about commandments as lights upon the earth – like in Psalm and quoted in matins (Lenten?) and in funeral service.

Can talk about Sacraments as doors to life – they show us what life is really meant to be like – Food as Communion, Water as New Life, Confession as healing, etc.

Sacraments bring the life of God into ours, bring God into our lives – depriving ourselves of them makes us weak, approaching unprepared harms us, but approaching with fear of God, faith, reverence and love bring us to life.

Mt. 6.25 – Take no thought for your life. Is not the life more than meat.... – Food meant for Communion

Mt. 7:14 – “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Mt.10:39 – He that loses his life...will find it...He that will save his life will lose it.

Mt. 16.25 -- similar

Mt. 19.17 – “If you would enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Note: Connection here of life with keeping commandments.

Lk. 12.15 – “...for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions... -- parable of the foolish man with building bigger barns and his life being required of him.

Lk 18.30 – (Mt.19.16-30; Mk. 10:17-31) – “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Note: There is a necessary giving up to gain. But if we look at it as giving up, we already lose, because what we are doing is gaining the Kingdom – Like during Lent – we are gaining our salvation, we are gaining the Kingdom, we are building a home in the heavens, rather than on earth, but our fallen nature, our flesh, tells us that we are losing our life and so we stop fasting, we stop praying, we see these things as interruptions to our real life. But we are fooled – these things aren’t real life – they are an illusion, bec we are never satisfied by them for any length of time. These things do not last.

Lk. 21.34 – “ But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare...”

Note: There is something about the cares of life that weigh us down – weighs our hearts down – we become dissipated (watered down, scattered, not ourselves)

Have to link Jesus Christ with the Church in some way – probably under Food of Life, ie. The Church as the Body of Christ – how is it, why is it.