

full sanctification, in the complete elimination of sin from the community of believers and from separate individuals.

Faith in the Church is not a substitute for faith in God. To believe in the Church is to believe that she is the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1 -22-23), that she is the concentration of grace on earth where man receives sanctification, and the abode of the grace of God throughout all ages, world without end (Matt. 16:18; 28:20; Eph. 3:21).

To have faith in the Church means to venerate in piety the true Church of Christ and to obey her teaching and commandments in the conviction that she is filled with the saving grace which guides and teaches us, and which pours forth from her One, Eternal Head our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because she is the Body of Christ the Church is fully in possession of all that is required for man's sanctification and salvation through grace. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Founder of the Church, Who taught men to have faith, love and charity, bade men above all to have faith in Him as their Lord. And as no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3), we must commune in the shrine in which the Holy Spirit permanently abides, and which we call the Church.

Faith in Christ leads us to the Church, and life in Christ is life in the Church. Thus, he who does not believe in the Church does not believe in God either. The Christian's life is impossible without faith in the Church, without abiding in the Church. It is impossible to understand Christ's teaching and to commune with Christ without the Church, for our salvation is not just

the reward for a righteous life, but also consists in the gradual merging of our life with the life of the Church, that is, the Body of Christ. The Church regenerates and renews all those who enter her and she vitalizes and elevates man, making him fit for a new holy life in Christ.

There is nothing accidental or arbitrary in the Church. Everything in her takes place through God's ordination. All that has been prescribed by the Church is and must be law for each and every one of us. The Christian also believes in the Church because obedience to the Church is obedience to God, and by serving the Church he serves God and earns His approval.

The Lord inspires man with faith in the Church through His grace by drawing him into the life of the Church. The Christian feels the power of Divine Grace acting upon him through the Holy Sacraments, the rites and the whole order of Orthodox Church life; and as he lives this life man attains an unshakeable conviction of the truth of his faith in the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

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For more on Orthodox Christianity see:
<http://ChurchMotherOfGod.org>
<http://www.oca.org> and
http://nynjoca.org/about_orthodoxy.html

Concerning One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

The Holy Church was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). The purpose of Christ's Church is the salvation of man. It is only in the Church that full union of man and God takes place, and this union is the basic condition for salvation.

By His suffering on the Cross the Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for human sin (John 1:29; Heb. 7:27) and by His Holy Blood He founded the Church (Acts 20:28), so that in her we might live by Him and for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Therefore there is no guarantee of salvation outside of the Church.

We are brought to the Church by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; for the Lord said that He would found the Church on the confession of faith (Matt. 16:18). Members of the Church are justified by God's grace (Rom. 3:24-30) and saved by God's power (Rom. 1:16) through faith in Christ and His Resurrection (Rom. 10:9) and by works of faith (James 2:17-26).

The Church is One as the Lord Who founded her is One (John 10:18). The Church is Holy, for she lives, acts, and thinks by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 8:15; 9:17). The Church is Catholic, for her flock has one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32) and her catholicity is dominant. The Church is Apostolic, for she keeps the Apostolic Succession by the laying-on of hands upon the hierarchs (Acts 6:6; 14:23; 20:28), and sacredly holds the Apostolic Tradition (2 Thess. 2:15).

St. Paul calls the Church the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and this definition of the Church as Christ's Body is not a symbol or

abstraction, but an expression of the Church's real mystical life, indicating the real union of God and man in Christ.

On one hand, as founded by God, the Church received her being and exists outside the usual order of human life and cannot be compared with it because she is a phenomenon full of profound mystery. On the other hand, however, the Church is a community of people united by their Orthodox faith, its doctrine, the hierarchy, and the Sacraments. The human side is changeable and imperfect, but the Church is Holy and Divine because she is sanctified by the Blood of Jesus Christ and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Who gives mankind true life in God.

The Church serves to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, for she was preordained by Christ to serve as a means of transfiguring the world in the Light of the Gospel Truth and to become the leaven for the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:33). The Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth, for she is the Church of the living God, Who is Truth itself. Therefore everything in her is true the confession of faith, sanctification by the Sacraments, the bestowal of grace, life according to God life upheld by God in her, God's help and His promises. The words the pillar and bulwark express the truth's firmness, immutability, and changelessness.

The Apostles, like Christ Himself, teach only one Church; they teach the unity of all in God: There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6).

The unity of the Church is founded on the mutual love of all the members of the Church: If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12). For it is precisely in that we share the bonds of love that we constitute the Church, the true Body of Christ, and for this reason the Lord commands us to love one another (John 15:17). It is by prayer offered in unity of spirit that the unity of the Church is achieved.

The unity of the Church exists by the power of the Divine Grace in the Holy Spirit. The unity of all the members of the Church with Christ and between one another exists in its highest form in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The unity of the Church is protected by the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils, the rules of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and Holy Tradition. The existence of Local Orthodox Churches does not contradict the unity of the Church. The fact that they are separate in their visible organization does not prevent them from being spiritually larger members of the one body of the Universal Church, or from sharing the One Head, Christ, and the one spirit of faith and grace. This unity is given visible expression by a single confession of faith and by communion in prayer and the Sacraments. The Local Orthodox Churches continually maintain Eucharistic Communion, honor and respect the traditions of

every Church, and always show one another their concern in mutual love.

If the Church is a unity, she is also divine and holy by her nature and essence. She was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and sanctified by His Passion and His Holy Blood. The Church is sanctified by the power of Christ the Savior's prayers (John 17:11-19). The Church is also holy by virtue of Christ's teaching. Through the glad tidings of the Gospel the Lord reveals His will to men, calls them to salvation and indicates the way to salvation and sanctity (Heb. 4:12).

The Holy Spirit, dwelling permanently in the Church, fills her with His sanctifying grace (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit sanctifies man and awakens him to deeds of selflessness and sanctity (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rom. 8:1-15). Divine service, the Sacraments, sermon, ritual, singing, fasting, prayer, icon, and architecture everything bears the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit and is directed towards the salvation of man.

The great assembly of Saints in the Orthodox Church is a living testimony to the sanctity of the Church. This is a proof of the reality of the life and action of Divine Grace in the souls of men. The Church is also holy through the lives of those of her children who, striving for Christian perfection, have devoted themselves entirely to the fulfillment of the will of God, of His Holy Commandments.

The extent to which a person preserves his sanctity is the extent to which he remains a member of the Church. Our sinfulness is outside the Church. Some individuals remain members of Christ's Church by virtue of the rudiments of the sanctity that is in them. That is why the process of the grace of salvation consists in our