

LEO XIV
GENERAL AUDIENCE
St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 18 February 2026

Catechesis. The Documents of Vatican Council II. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 1. *The mystery of the Church, sacrament of the union with God, and the unity of all humanity*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

When the [Second Vatican Council](#), whose documents are the focus of our [series of] catecheses, wanted to describe the Church, it was concerned first and foremost with explaining where her origins lie. In order to do so, in the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen gentium](#), approved on 21 November 1964, it drew the term “mystery” from the Letters of Saint Paul. By choosing this word, it did not intend to say that the Church is something obscure or incomprehensible, as is commonly thought when the word “mystery” is heard. It is exactly the opposite: indeed, when Saint Paul uses the word, especially in the Letter to the Ephesians, he wishes to indicate a reality that was previously hidden and is now revealed.

It refers to God’s plan, which has a purpose: to unite all creatures thanks to the reconciliatory action of Jesus Christ, an action that was accomplished through his death on the cross. This is experienced first of all in the assembly gathered for the liturgical celebration: there, differences are relativized, and what counts is being together because we are drawn by the Love of Christ, that broke down the wall of separation between people and social groups (cf. Eph 2:14). For Saint Paul, the mystery is the manifestation of what God wanted to achieve for the whole of humanity, and it is made known in local experiences, which gradually expand to include all human beings and even the cosmos.

The condition of humanity is one of fragmentation that human beings are unable to repair, even though the tendency towards unity dwells in their heart. Jesus Christ’s action enters into this condition, and through the Holy Spirit, he overcomes the powers of division and the Divider himself. Gathering together to celebrate, having believed in the proclamation of the Gospel, is experienced as an attraction exerted by the cross of Christ, which is the supreme manifestation of God’s love. It is feeling called together by God: this is why the term *ekklesía* is used, that is, an assembly of people who recognise that they have been summoned together. So, there is a certain connection between this mystery and the Church: the Church is the mystery made perceptible.

Precisely because it is brought about by God, this convocation cannot be limited to a group of people, but rather is destined to become the experience of all human beings. Thus, at the beginning of the Constitution [Lumen gentium](#), the [Second Vatican Council](#) states: “The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (no. 1). With the use of the term

“sacrament” and the consequent explanation, it is intended to indicate that, in the history of humanity, the Church is an expression of what God wants to accomplish. By looking at the Church, therefore, to some extent we can grasp God’s plan, the mystery. In this sense, the Church is a sign. Moreover, the term “instrument” is added to the term “sacrament”, precisely to show that the Church is an active sign. Indeed, when God works in history, he involves the recipients of his action in his activity. It is through the Church that God achieves the aim of uniting people to himself and reuniting them with one another.

Union with God is reflected in the union of human beings. This is the experience of salvation. It is not a coincidence that point 48 in Chapter 7 of the Constitution [*Lumen gentium*](#), dedicated to the eschatological nature of the pilgrim Church, describes the Church as a sacrament, with the specification “of salvation”: “Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself (cf. Jn 12:32). Rising from the dead (cf. Rom 6:9) He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood”.

This text enables us to understand the relationship between the unifying action of the Pasch of Jesus, which is the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection, and the identity of the Church. At the same time, it makes us grateful to belong to the Church, the body of the risen Christ and the one people of God on pilgrimage through history, that lives as a sanctifying presence in the midst of a still fragmented humanity, as an effective sign of unity and reconciliation among peoples.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters,

In our continuing catechesis on the [*Second Vatican Council*](#), we have reflected upon various aspects of Divine Revelation. In particular, we have seen how God chose to reveal himself, making known the loving mystery of his divine plan to unite all people to him through his Son, Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is only within this mystery that we can understand both the origin and the mission of the Church. In this light, we turn today to consider [*Lumen Gentium*](#), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which presents the Church as both a sign and an instrument of this plan of salvation. A sign because the Church community makes the unity established by Christ through his Cross and Resurrection visible to the world today. An instrument because it is through the Church that God achieves his goal of uniting people to himself and bringing them together. As we journey through a world still marked by division, let us ask the Lord to continue to guide his Church in the mission of sanctification and reconciliation.

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 4 March 2026

Catechesis. The Documents of Vatican Council II. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 2. *The Church, a Visible and Spiritual Reality*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Today, we will continue our exploration of the Conciliar Constitution [*Lumen gentium*](#), a dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

In the first chapter, which is primarily intended to answer the question of what the Church is, she is described as a “complex reality” ([no. 8](#)). Now we ask ourselves: what does this complexity consist of? Some might answer that the Church is complex in that she is ‘complicated’ and therefore difficult to explain; others might think that her complexity derives from the fact that she is an institution steeped in two thousand years of history, with characteristics that differ from any other social or religious group. In Latin, however, the word ‘complex’ indicates rather the orderly union of different aspects or dimensions within the same reality. For this reason, [*Lumen gentium*](#) can affirm that the Church is a well-organized body, in which the human and divine dimensions coexist without separation and without confusion.

The first dimension is immediately perceptible, in that the Church is a community of men and women who share the joy and struggle of being Christians, with their strengths and weaknesses, proclaiming the Gospel and becoming a sign of the presence of Christ who accompanies us on our journey through life. Yet this aspect – which is also evident in its institutional organization – is not sufficient to describe the true nature of the Church, because it also has a divine dimension. The latter does not consist in an ideal perfection or spiritual superiority of its members, but in the fact that the Church is generated by God’s plan for humanity, realized in Christ.

Therefore, the Church is at the same time an earthly community and the mystical body of Christ, a visible assembly and a spiritual mystery, a reality present in history and a people journeying towards heaven (*LG*, 8; *CCC*, 771).

The human and divine dimensions integrate harmoniously, without one overshadowing the other; thus, the Church lives in this paradox. She is a reality that is both human and divine, which welcomes the sinful man and leads him to God.

To illuminate this ecclesial condition, [*Lumen gentium*](#) refers to the life of Christ. In fact, those who met Jesus along the roads of Palestine experienced his humanity, his eyes, his hands, the sound of his voice. Those who decided to follow him were moved precisely by the experience of his welcoming gaze, the touch of his blessing hands, his words of liberation and healing. At the same time, however, by following that Man, the disciples opened themselves to an encounter with God. Indeed, Christ’s flesh, his face, his gestures and his words visibly manifest the invisible God.

In the light of the reality of Jesus, we can now return to the Church: when we look at her closely, we discover a human dimension made up of real people, who sometimes manifest the beauty of the Gospel and other times struggle and make mistakes like everyone else. However, it is precisely through her members and her limited earthly aspects that Christ’s presence and his saving action are manifested. As [Benedict XVI](#) said, there is no opposition between the Gospel and the institution; on the contrary, the structures of the Church serve

precisely for the “realization and concretization of the Gospel in our time” ([Address to Swiss Bishops](#), 9 November 2006). An ideal and pure Church, separated from the earth, does not exist; only the one Church of Christ, embodied in history.

This is what constitutes the holiness of the Church: the fact that Christ dwells in her and continues to give himself through the smallness and fragility of her members. Contemplating this perennial miracle that takes place in her, we understand ‘God’s method’: He makes himself visible through the weakness of creatures, continuing to manifest himself and to act. For this reason, [Pope Francis](#), in [Evangelii gaudium](#), exhorts us all to learn “to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5)” ([no. 169](#)). This enables us still today to build up the Church: not only by organizing its visible forms, but by building that spiritual edifice which is the body of Christ, through communion and charity among ourselves.

Indeed, charity constantly generates the presence of the Risen One. “If only we could all just let our thoughts dwell on the one thing, charity! It’s the only thing, you see, which both surpasses all things, and without which all things worth nothing, and which draws all things to itself, wherever it may be” (*Sermon* 354, 6, 6).

Summary of the Holy Father’s words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing catechesis on the [Second Vatican Council](#), today we consider the mystery of the human and divine dimensions of the Church as presented by the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen Gentium](#). Just as Jesus’ humanity was immediately apparent to those who walked by his side, so too the human dimension of the Church is easy to perceive: it is a community of men and women who, with their gifts and their flaws, seek to proclaim the Gospel within a visible structure. Those who followed Jesus more closely, however, recognized that his humanity — his loving gaze, his merciful gestures and his powerful word — manifested his divinity, which led them to salvation. In a similar way, through the visible and human dimension of the Church, the spirit of Christ and his saving action are present and active in the world. Let us strive to be authentic witnesses of the love of Christ so that all can recognize in us and among us the charity that characterizes true Christians and builds up the Church.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter’s Square

Wednesday, 11 March 2026

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Continuing in our reflection on the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen gentium](#) (*LG*), today we will look at the second chapter, dedicated to the People of God.

God, who created the world and humanity, and who wishes to save every man, carries out his work of salvation in history, choosing a real people and dwelling among them. For this reason, He calls Abraham and promises him descendants as numerous as the stars in the

sky and the sand on the seashore (cf. *Gen* 22:17-18). With Abraham's children, after freeing them from slavery, God makes a covenant with them, accompanies them, cares for them, and gathers them together whenever they stray. Therefore, the identity of this people is given by God's action and by faith in Him. They are called to become a light for other nations, like a beacon that will draw all peoples, the whole of humanity, to itself (cf. *Is* 2:1-5).

The Council affirms that "All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant, which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that fuller revelation which was to be given through the Word of God Himself made flesh" ([LG](#), 9). Indeed, it is Christ who, in giving His Body and His Blood, unites this people in Himself and in a definitive way. It is a people now made up of members of every nation; it is united by faith in Him, by adherence to Him, by living the same life as Him, animated by the Spirit of the Risen One. This is the Church: the people of God who draw their existence from the body of Christ [\[1\]](#) and who are themselves the body of Christ; [\[2\]](#) not a people like any other, but the People of God, called together by Him and made up of women and men from all the peoples of the earth. Its unifying principle is not a language, a culture, an ethnicity, but faith in Christ: the Church is therefore – according to a splendid expression of the Council – the assembly of "all those who in faith look upon Jesus" ([LG](#), 9).

It is a messianic people, precisely because it has Christ, the Messiah, as its head. Those who belong to it do not pride themselves on merits or titles, but only on the gift of being, in Christ and through Him, daughters and sons of God. Above any task or function, therefore, what really matters in the Church is to be grafted onto Christ, to be children of God by grace. This is also the only honorary title we should seek as Christians. We are in the Church in order to receive life from the Father unceasingly and to live as His children and brothers and sisters among ourselves. Consequently, the law that animates relationships in the Church is love, as we receive and experience it in Jesus; and her goal is the Kingdom of God, towards which she walks together with all humanity.

Unified in Christ, Lord and Saviour of every man and woman, the Church can never turn inwards on herself, but is open to everyone and is for everyone. If believers in Christ belong to it, the Council reminds us that "All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, remaining one and unique, must extend to the whole world and to all ages, so that the intention of God's will may be fulfilled, who in the beginning created human nature as one and wants to gather together his children who were scattered" ([LG](#), 13). Even those who have not yet received the Gospel are therefore, in some way, oriented towards the people of God, and the Church, cooperating in Christ's mission, is called upon to spread the Gospel everywhere and to everyone (cf. [LG](#) 17), so that every person may enter into contact with Christ. This means that in the Church there is, and there must be, a place for everyone, and that every Christian is called to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness in every environment in which he or she lives and works. Thus, this people shows its catholicity, welcoming the wealth and resources of different cultures and, at the same time, offering them the newness of the Gospel to purify them and to raise them up (cf. [LG](#), 13).

In this regard, the Church is one but includes everyone. A great theologian described it thus: "The unique Ark of Salvation must welcome all human diversity into its vast nave. The only

banquet hall, the food it distributes is drawn from all of creation. The seamless garment of Christ, it is also – and it is the same thing – the garment of Joseph, with its many colours”. [\[3\]](#)

It is a great sign of hope – especially in our times, traversed by so many conflicts and wars – to know that the Church is a people in which women and men of different nationalities, languages and cultures live together in faith: it is a sign placed in the very heart of humanity, a reminder and prophecy of that unity and peace to which God the Father calls all his children.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 18 March 2026*

Catechesis. The Documents of Vatican Council II. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 4. *The Church, a Priestly and Prophetic People*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Today I would like to revisit the second chapter of the Conciliar Constitution [Lumen gentium](#) ([LG](#)), devoted to the Church as the people of God.

The messianic people ([LG](#), 9), receive from Christ the participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly work office through which his salvific mission is carried out. The Council Fathers teach that the Lord Jesus, through the new and eternal Covenant, has established a kingdom of priests, constituting his disciples as a ‘royal priesthood’ (*1 Pet* 2:9; cf. *1 Pet* 2:5; *Rev* 1:6). This common priesthood of the faithful is given with Baptism, which enables us to worship God in spirit and truth, and to “confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church” ([LG](#), 11). Furthermore, through the sacrament of Confirmation, all the baptized “are more perfectly bound to the Church ... and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ” (*ibid.*). This consecration is at the root of the common mission that unites the ordained ministries and the lay faithful.

In this regard, [Pope Francis](#) observed that, “Looking at the People of God is remembering that we all enter the Church as lay people. The first sacrament, which seals our identity forever, and of which we should always be proud, is Baptism. Through Baptism and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, (the faithful) ‘are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood’ ([LG](#), 10), [so that] everyone forms the faithful Holy People of God” ([Letter to the President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America](#), 19 March 2016).

The exercise of the royal priesthood takes place in many ways, all aimed at our sanctification, first and foremost through participation in the offering of the Eucharist. Through prayer, asceticism and active charity, we thus bear witness to a life renewed by

God's grace (cf. [LG](#), 10). As the Council summarizes, "it is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation" ([LG](#), 11).

The Council Fathers then teach that the holy People of God also participate in the prophetic mission of Christ (cf. [LG](#), 12). In this context, the important theme of the *sense of the faith* and the *consensus of the faithful* is introduced. The Doctrinal Commission of the Council specified that this *sensus fidei* "is like a faculty of the whole Church, by which she, in her faith, recognises the revelation handed down, distinguishing between true and false in matters of faith, and at the same time penetrates it more deeply and applies it more fully in life" (cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/1, 199). The sense of faith therefore belongs to individual believers not in their own right, but as members of the People of God as a whole.

[Lumen gentium](#) focuses on this latter aspect, and places it in relation to the infallibility of the Church, to which that of the Roman Pontiff is inherent and by which it is served. "The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (c. *1 Jn* 2:20,27), cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" ([LG](#), 12). The Church, therefore, as the communion of the faithful – which naturally includes the pastors – cannot err in matters of faith: the organ through which this truth is preserved, founded on the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is the *supernatural sense of faith* of the entire People of God, which is manifested in the *consensus of the faithful*. From this unity, which the Magisterium of the Church safeguards, it follows that every baptized person is an active agent of evangelization, called to bear consistent witness to Christ in accordance with the prophetic gift which the Lord bestows upon His whole Church.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit, who comes to us from the Risen Christ, "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church" ([LG](#), 12). A particular demonstration of this charismatic vitality is offered by consecrated life, which continually germinates and flourishes through the work of grace. Ecclesial associations, too, are a shining example of the variety and fruitfulness of spiritual fruits for the edification of the People of God.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing catechesis on the [Second Vatican Council](#), today we consider the participation of the faithful in Jesus Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal offices, as presented by the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen Gentium](#). Through the sacrament of baptism, each of us are called to share in Christ's royal priesthood (*1 Pt* 2:9) and to worship him in spirit and truth, especially through our participation in the Eucharist. We also partake in Jesus' prophetic mission, for we are called to bear witness to the truth of the faith. Indeed, the Council Fathers taught that "the whole body of the faithful ... cannot be mistaken in belief. It shows this characteristic through the entire people's supernatural sense of faith when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals" ([LG](#), 12). Along with these gifts shared by all members of the Church, the Holy Spirit continues to allot special graces to the faithful in

order to enrich and build up the body of Christ. It is important that we recognize these manifold gifts and express our gratitude to God for allowing us to be partakers in his work of salvation.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 25 March 2026*

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 5. *On the foundation of the Apostles. The Church in her hierarchical dimension*"

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

We will continue our catecheses on the [Documents of the Second Vatican Council](#), commenting on the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen gentium](#) on the Church ([LG](#)). After presenting her as the People of God, today we will consider her hierarchical form.

The Catholic Church is founded on the Apostles, whom Christ appointed as the living pillars of His mystical Body, and possesses a hierarchical structure that works in the service of the unity, mission and sanctification of all her members. This sacred Order is permanently founded on the Apostles (cf. *Eph* 2:20; *Rev* 21:14), as authoritative witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 1:22; *1 Cor* 15:7) and sent by the Lord Himself on mission into the world (cf. *Mk* 16:15; *Mt* 28:19). Since the Apostles are called to faithfully preserve the Master's salvific teaching (cf. *2 Tim* 1:13–14), they hand on their ministry to men who, until Christ's return, continue to sanctify, guide and instruct the Church "through their successors in pastoral office" ([Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 857](#)).

This apostolic succession, founded on the Gospel and in the Tradition, is explored further in Chapter III of [Lumen gentium](#), entitled "*On the hierarchical structure of the Church and in particular on the Episcopate*". The Council teaches that the hierarchical structure is not a human construct, functional to the internal organization of the Church as a social body (cf. [LG](#), 8), but a divine institution whose purpose is to perpetuate the mission given by Christ to the Apostles until the end of time.

The fact that this theme is addressed in Chapter III, after the first two chapters have considered the very essence of the Church (cf. *Acta Synodalia* III/1, 209–210), does not imply that the hierarchical constitution is a subsequent element with respect to the People of God: as the Decree [Ad gentes](#) notes, "the Apostles were the first budding-forth of the New Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy" (no. 5), inasmuch as they were the community of those redeemed by Christ's Paschal Mystery, established as a means of salvation for the world.

To understand the Council's intention, it is advisable to read carefully the title of Chapter III of [*Lumen gentium*](#), which explains the fundamental structure of the Church, received from God the Father through the Son and brought to fulfilment by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Council Fathers did not want to present the institutional elements of the Church, as the noun "constitution" might imply if understood in the modern sense. The Document concentrates instead on the "ministerial or hierarchical priesthood", which differs "in essence and not only in degree" from the common priesthood of the faithful, recalling that the latter are "nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ" ([LG](#), 10). The Council thus addresses the ministry conferred upon men endowed with *sacra potestas*, sacred power (cf. [LG](#), 18) for service in the Church: it focuses in particular on the episcopate ([LG](#), 18–27), then on the priesthood ([LG](#), 28) and the diaconate ([LG](#), 29) as degrees of the one sacrament of Holy Orders.

By the adjective "hierarchical", therefore, the Council intends to indicate the sacred origin of the apostolic ministry in the action of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as well as its internal relationships. The Bishops, first and foremost, and through them the priests and deacons, have received tasks (in Latin *munera*), which lead them to the service of "all those who belong to the People of God", so that, "working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, [they] may arrive at salvation" ([LG](#), 18).

[*Lumen gentium*](#) repeatedly and effectively recalls the collegial and communal nature of this apostolic mission, reaffirming that the "duty which the Lord committed to the shepherds of His people is a true service, which in sacred literature is significantly called 'diakonia' or ministry" ([LG](#), 24). We can therefore understand why [Saint Paul VI](#) presented the hierarchy as a reality "born of the charity of Christ, to fulfil, spread and ensure the intact and fruitful transmission of the wealth of faith, examples, precepts and charisms bequeathed by Christ to His Church" (*Address*, 14 September 1964, in *Acta Synodalia* III/1, 147).

Dear sisters, dear brothers, let us pray to the Lord that He may send to His Church ministers who are ardent with evangelical charity, dedicated to the good of all the baptized, and courageous missionaries in every part of the world.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters,

In our ongoing catechesis on the [Second Vatican Council](#), today we reflect on the teachings of the Dogmatic Constitution [*Lumen Gentium*](#) concerning the hierarchical structure of the Church. In this regard, it is helpful to bear in mind that the Church is not something we invented, but is a divine institution established by Jesus himself. Christ appointed the apostles, placing Peter at their head, and sent them out to continue his salvific mission until his return in glory. To perpetuate this same mission, ministers were invested with sacred power to be the successors of the Apostles as Bishops, in whose ministry priests and deacons likewise participate through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Sharing in the ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, they are consecrated to serve the faithful, build up the Church and ensure the fruitful transmission of the faith. Let us therefore ask the Lord to continue to bless his Church with shepherds after his own heart.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 1st April 2026*

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 6. *Living stones in the Church and witnesses in the world: the laity in the People of God*"

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue on our path of reflection on the Church as she is presented to us in the Conciliar Constitution [*Lumen gentium*](#) (*LG*). Today we will look at the fourth chapter, which deals with the laity. Let us all remember what [Pope Francis](#) liked to repeat: "Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority — ordained ministers — are at their service" (Apostolic Exhortation [*Evangelii gaudium*](#), 102).

This section of the Document seeks to explain, in positive terms, the nature and mission of the laity, after centuries in which they had been defined simply as those who are not part of the clergy or the consecrated life. For this reason, I would like to revisit with you a very beautiful passage that speaks of the greatness of the Christian condition: "Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (*Eph* 4:5); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity" ([*LG*](#), 32).

Before any distinction of ministry or state of life, the Council affirms the equality of all the baptized. The Constitution does not want us to forget what it had already affirmed in the chapter on the People of God, namely that the condition of the messianic people is the dignity and freedom of the children of God (cf. [*LG*](#), 9).

Naturally, the greater the gift, the greater the commitment too. For this reason, the [Council](#), along with dignity, also emphasizes the mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. But on what is this mission founded, and in what does it consist? The very description of the laity offered by the Council tells us: "The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful... [who] are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world" ([*LG*](#), 31).

The holy People of God, therefore, is never a formless mass, but the body of Christ, or, as Saint Augustine said, the *Christus totus*; it is a community organically structured by means of the fruitful relationship between the two forms of participation in the priesthood of Christ: the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood (cf. [*LG*](#), 10). By virtue of Baptism, the lay faithful participate in the very priesthood of Christ. Indeed, "the

supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since He wills to continue His witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work” ([LG](#), 34).

In this regard, how can we fail to recall [Saint John Paul II](#) and his Apostolic Exhortation [Christifideles Laici](#) (30 December 1988)? In it, he emphasized that “the Council, with its rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral patrimony, has written as never before on the nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility of the lay faithful. And the Council Fathers, re-echoing the call of Christ, have summoned all the lay faithful, both women and men, to labour in the vineyard” (no. 2). In this way, my venerable Predecessor relaunched the apostolate of the laity, to which the Council dedicated a specific Document, which we will talk about later (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree [Apostolicam actuositatem](#), 18 November 1965).

The vast field of the lay apostolate is not confined to the Church, but extends to the world. Indeed, the Church is present wherever her children profess and bear witness to the Gospel: in the workplace, in civil society and in all human relationships, wherever they, through their choices, show the beauty of Christian life, which foretells here and now the justice and peace that will be accomplished in the Kingdom of God. The world needs to “be permeated by the spirit of Christ, and more effectively fulfil its purpose in justice, charity and peace” ([LG](#), 36). And this is possible only through the contribution, service and witness of the laity!

It is an invitation to be the Church ‘which goes forth’ that [Pope Francis](#) spoke to us about: a Church embodied in history, always open to mission, in which we are all called to be missionary disciples, apostles of the Gospel, witnesses of the Kingdom of God, bearers of the joy of Christ whom we have encountered!

Brothers and sisters, may the Easter we are preparing to celebrate renew in us the grace to be,

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters,

In our ongoing catechesis on the Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen Gentium](#), we turn today to consider the laity. Rather than limiting itself to defining the laity for what they are not, the [Second Vatican Council](#) sought to shed light on their innate dignity as members of the People of God and underline the peculiarity of their role in the mission of the Church. Having been incorporated into Christ through Baptism, the laity are made sharers in their own way in his priestly, prophetic and kingly office. The Church is present wherever her children profess the Gospel and bear witness to Christ. For this reason, lay men and women are particularly called to carry Christ’s presence to all spheres of life and so transform them from within by bearing witness to the beauty of a life in Christ and the elevating power of his grace.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 8 April 2026*

The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 7. Holiness and evangelical counsels in the Church

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

The Constitution of the [Second Vatican Council *Lumen gentium* \(LG\)](#) on the Church dedicates an entire chapter, the fifth, to the universal vocation to holiness of all the faithful: every one of us is called to live in the grace of God, practising the virtues and imitating Christ. Holiness, according to the Conciliar Constitution, is not a privilege for the few, but a gift that requires every baptized person to strive for the perfection of charity, that is, the fullness of love towards God and towards one's neighbour. Charity is, in fact, the heart of the holiness to which all believers are called: infused by the Father, through the Son Jesus, this virtue "rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means" ([LG](#), 42). The highest level of holiness, as in the early days of the Church, is martyrdom, the "supreme witness of faith and charity" ([LG](#), 50): for this reason, the Council text teaches that every believer must be ready to confess Christ even unto blood (cf. [LG](#), 42), as has always been the case and continues to be so today. This readiness to bear witness is realized every time Christians leave signs of faith and love in society, committing themselves to justice.

All the Sacraments, and in a pre-eminent way the Eucharist, are nourishment that fosters a holy life, assimilating every person to Christ, the model and measure of holiness. He sanctifies the Church, of which He is the Head and Shepherd: holiness is, from this point of view, His gift, which is manifested in our daily life every time we receive it with joy and respond to it with commitment. In this regard, [Saint Paul VI](#), in the General Audience of 20 October 1965, recalled that the Church, to be authentic, requires that all the baptized must "be holy, that is, truly worthy, strong and faithful children of hers". This is realized as an inner transformation, whereby the life of every person is conformed to Christ by virtue of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 8:29; [LG](#), 40).

[Lumen gentium](#) describes the holiness of the Catholic Church as one of her constitutive characteristics, to receive in faith, inasmuch as she is believed to be "indefectibly holy" ([LG](#), 39): this does not mean that she is so in a full and perfect sense, but that she is called to confirm this divine gift during her pilgrimage towards the eternal destination, walking "amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God" (Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 51,2; [LG](#), 8). The sad reality of sin in the Church, that is, in all of us, invites each person to carry out a serious change of life, entrusting ourselves to the Lord, who renews us in charity. It is precisely this infinite grace, which sanctifies the Church, that entrusts us with a mission to fulfil day after day: that of our conversion. Therefore, holiness does not only have a practical nature, as if it were reducible to an ethical commitment, however great, but concerns the very essence of Christian life, both personal and communal.

From this perspective, a decisive role is played by consecrated life, which the Conciliar Constitution considers in the sixth chapter (cf. nos. 43-47). In the holy People of God, it constitutes a prophetic sign of the new world, experienced here and now in history. Indeed,

signs of the Kingdom of God, already present in the mystery of the Church, are those evangelical counsels that shape every experience of consecrated life: poverty, chastity and obedience. These three virtues are not rules that shackle freedom, but liberating gifts of the Holy Spirit, through which some of the faithful are wholly consecrated to God. Poverty expresses complete trust in Providence, freeing one from calculation and self-interest; obedience takes as its model the self-giving that Christ offered to the Father, freeing one from suspicion and domination; chastity is the gift of a heart that is whole and pure in love, at the service of God and the Church.

By conforming to this style of life, consecrated persons bear witness to the universal vocation of holiness of the entire Church, in the form of radical discipleship. The evangelical counsels manifest full participation in the life of Christ, unto the Cross: it is precisely by the sacrifice of the Crucified One that we are all redeemed and sanctified! By contemplating this event, we know that there is no human experience that God does not redeem: even suffering, lived in union with the passion of the Lord, becomes a path of holiness. The grace that converts and transforms life thus strengthens us in every trial, pointing us not towards a distant ideal, but towards the encounter with God, who became man out of love. May the Virgin Mary, the all-holy Mother of the Incarnate Word, always sustain and protect our journey.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in today's catechesis on the Dogmatic Constitution [*Lumen Gentium*](#), we turn our attention to the universal call to holiness. Every baptized person is called to be holy: to live in God's grace, to practice virtue and to become like Christ. At its heart is love for both God and neighbor, and its greatest expression is martyrdom, the supreme witness of faith and charity. For this reason, the Church teaches that believers should be ready to confess Christ to the point of shedding blood. However, the interior transformation that conforms us to Christ is not possible without the aid of the Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. In this regard, I would like to make particular mention of those men and women who consecrate their lives to God through the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience which express their complete trust in God's providence, modelled on Christ's gift of himself to the Father with a pure heart. By their lives, consecrated persons radically witness to the fullness of life in Christ, even to the cross.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 6 May 2026*

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 8. The Church, pilgrim in history towards the heavenly homeland

Brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

As we focus today on a section of Chapter VII of the [Second Vatican Council's Constitution](#) on the Church, let us reflect on one of its defining characteristics: its *eschatological dimension*. The Church, in fact, journeys through this earthly history always looking towards her final destination, which is the heavenly homeland. This is an essential dimension which, however, we often overlook or downplay, because we are too focused on what is immediately visible and on the more concrete dynamics of the life of the Christian community.

The Church is God's people journeying through history, which has the Kingdom of God as the purpose of all her action (cf. [LG](#), 9). Jesus initiated the Church precisely by proclaiming this Kingdom of love, justice and peace (cf. [LG](#), 5). We are therefore called to consider the community and cosmic dimension of salvation in Christ and to turn our eyes to this final horizon, to measure and evaluate everything from this perspective.

The Church lives in history in the service of the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world. She proclaims the words of this promise to all and always; she receives a pledge of it in the celebration of the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; she puts its logic into practice and experiences it in relationships of love and service. Furthermore, she knows that she is the place and the means where union with Christ is realized "more closely" ([LG](#), 48), whilst at the same time recognizing that salvation can be bestowed by God in the Holy Spirit even beyond her visible boundaries.

In this regard, the Constitution [Lumen gentium](#) makes an important statement: the Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation" ([LG](#), 48), that is, the sign and instrument of that fullness of life and peace promoted by God. This means that she does not identify perfectly with the Kingdom of God, but is its seed and beginning, for its fulfilment will be granted to humanity and the cosmos only at the end. Believers in Christ, therefore, walk through this earthly history, marked by the maturation of good but also by injustices and sufferings, without being either deluded or despairing; they live guided by the promise received from the One who will "make all things new" (*Rev* 21:5). Therefore, the Church realizes her mission between the "already" of the beginning of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, and the "not yet" of the promised and anticipated fulfilment. As the guardian of a hope that enlightens the path, she is also invested with the mission of speaking clearly to reject everything that mortifies life and prevents its development, and to take a position in favour of the poor, the exploited, the victims of violence and war, and all those who suffer in body and in spirit (cf. [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), no. 159).

As the sign and sacrament of the Kingdom, the Church is the pilgrim people of God on earth who, drawing precisely on the final promise, reads and interprets the dynamics of history through the Gospel, denouncing evil in all its forms and proclaiming, in word and deed, the salvation that Christ wishes to bring about for all humanity and His Kingdom of justice, love

and peace. The Church, therefore, does not proclaim herself; on the contrary, everything within her must point to salvation in Christ.

From this perspective, the Church is called to recognize humbly the human fragility and transience of her own institutions who, despite being at the service of the Kingdom of God, bear the fleeting image of this world (cf. [LG](#), 48). No ecclesial institution can be treated as absolute; indeed, since they exist within history and time, they are called to continual conversion, to the renewal of forms and the reform of structures, to the continual regeneration of relationships, so that they may truly fulfil their mission.

Within the horizon of the Kingdom of God, we must also understand the relationship between the Christians who are carrying out their mission today, and those who have already completed their earthly existence and are in a state of purification or beatitude. [Lumen gentium](#), in fact, affirms that all Christians form a single Church, that there is communion and sharing of spiritual goods founded on the union with Christ of all believers, a *fraterna sollicitudo* between the earthly Church and the heavenly Church: that communion of saints that is experienced in particular in the liturgy (cf. [LG](#), 49-51). By praying for the departed and following in the footsteps of those who have already lived as disciples of Jesus, we too are sustained on our journey and strengthen our worship of God: marked by the one Spirit and united in the one liturgy, together with those who have gone before us in faith, we praise and give glory to the Most Holy Trinity.

Let us be grateful to the Council Fathers for reminding us of this most important and beautiful aspect of being Christian, and may we strive to cultivate it in our lives.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our ongoing catechesis on *Lumen Gentium*, we focus on the eschatological dimension of the Church. As the “universal sacrament of salvation,” the Church is a sign and instrument of the fullness of God’s promises. As the pilgrim People of God, the Church interprets history through the lens of the Gospel and speaks decisively against all evil. At the same time, the Church acknowledges the need for continual conversion so she may properly fulfill her mission. As members of the same Body, we too are called to renewal. We do this by remaining in communion with Christ and one another. The entire Church is most closely united in our praise of God in the liturgy. There we pray for the faithful departed and ask the Saints to intercede for us so that we may all receive the fullness of God’s promises in the Kingdom of Heaven.

LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 13 May 2026

Catechesis. The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 9. *The Virgin Mary, model of the Church*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

[The Second Vatican Council](#) chose to dedicate the last chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church to the Virgin Mary (cf. [Lumen gentium](#), 52-69). She “is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent example in faith and charity” ([LG](#), 53). These words invite us to understand how in Mary, who under the action of the Holy Spirit welcomed and brought forth the Son of God made flesh, we can recognize both the model and the pre-eminent member and mother of the entire ecclesial community.

By allowing Herself to be shaped by the work of Grace, which came to fulfilment in Her, and by welcoming the gift of the Most High with Her faith and Her virginal love, Mary is the perfect model of what the whole Church is called to be: a creature of the Word of the Lord and mother of the children of God, begotten in docility to the action of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as She is the believer par excellence, in whom we are offered the perfect form of unconditional openness to the divine mystery within the communion of God’s holy people, Mary is an excellent member of the ecclesial community. Finally, inasmuch as She brings forth children in the Son, loved in the eternal Beloved who came among us, Mary is the mother of the whole Church, which can turn to her with filial confidence, in the certainty of being heard, protected and loved.

One might express the sum of these characteristics of the Virgin Mary by referring to Her as a woman who is the icon of the Mystery. The word woman highlights the historical reality of this young daughter of Israel, to whom it was granted to live the extraordinary experience of becoming the mother of the Messiah. The expression icon emphasizes that, in Her, the twofold movement of descent and ascent is fulfilled: in Her, both God’s gratuitous election and Her free consent of faith in Him shine forth. Mary is therefore the woman who is the icon of the Mystery, that is, of the divine plan of salvation, once hidden and now revealed in its fullness in Jesus Christ.

The Council has left us a clear teaching on the unique place reserved to the Virgin Mary in the work of Redemption (cf. [Lumen gentium](#), 60-62). It recalls that the sole Mediator of salvation is Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim 2:5-6), and that his Mother Most Holy “in no way impedes, but rather fosters the immediate union of the faithful with Christ” (cf. [LG](#), 60). At the same time, “predestined from eternity by that decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin ... in this singular way ... cooperated by Her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore She is our mother in the order of grace” ([ibid.](#), 61).

The mystery of the Church is also reflected in the Virgin Mary: in Her, the people of God find the representation of their origin, their model and their homeland. In the Mother of the Lord, the Church contemplates her own mystery, not only because she finds in Her the model of virginal faith, maternal charity and the spousal covenant to which she is called, but also and above all because in Her she recognizes her own archetype, the ideal figure of what she is called to be.

As we can see, the reflections on the Virgin Mother collected in [Lumen gentium](#) teach us to love the Church and to serve within her the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, which is coming and which will be fully realized in glory.

Let us be challenged, therefore, by the sublime model who is Mary, Virgin and Mother, and let us ask Her to help us, through Her intercession, to respond to what is asked of us through Her example: do I live my participation of the Church with humble and active faith? Do I recognize in her the community of the covenant that God has given me to respond to His infinite love? Do I feel that I am a living part of the Church, in obedience to the pastors given by God? Do I look to Mary as a model, an outstanding member and Mother of the Church, and ask Her to help me be a faithful disciple of her Son?

Sisters and brothers, may the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Mary and is invoked by us humbly and trustfully, grant us the grace to live these wonderful realities to the full. And, having reflected deeply on the Constitution [*Lumen gentium*](#), let us ask the Virgin to obtain this gift for us: that love for the Holy Mother Church may grow in all of us. So be it!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our catechesis today we contemplate Mary, whom the final chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution [*Lumen Gentium*](#) recognizes as *model*, perfect *member*, and as *mother*. Docile to the Father's will, her son's work of redemption and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, Mary is the *model* of what the Church is meant to be. Her unconditional "yes" shows us how to be *members* of the Church. As our *mother* by grace, she is the one to whom we can turn with filial trust, in the certainty of being heard, protected, and loved. In a special way, Mary cooperated in the work of salvation, through obedience, faith, hope, and ardent charity, to restore through her Son, the supernatural life of souls. Let us be challenged by Mary's example of humility, active faith and obedience. Let us generously respond in love, magnifying God in our hearts, and receiving strength from the sacraments. Let us ask Mary to help us be faithful disciples of her Son.