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Love for the Church, Responsibility for the Church

From chapter 5.

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“Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam!” – I can well understand that pause of yours as you pray, savoring the words: ‘I believe in the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.’” And also: “What joy to be able to say with all the fervor of my soul: I love my Mother, the holy Church!” These

words from *The Way*, which sprang forth from St. Josemaría's love-filled heart, highlight one of the deepest convictions of a Christian, namely, that one is never a Christian in isolation; rather, one is always a Christian in the Church and through the Church....

The Church is much more than a human institution; more also than simply the gathering of those who, sharing in the same faith, continue a tradition born twenty centuries ago in the land of Palestine. The Church is made up of men and women, but it comes from God. And this is so not only because Christ, the incarnate Son of God, constituted it by calling the first disciples and sending them out to preach the Gospel to the furthest corner of the earth. As He expressly promised, in a phrase recorded by St. Matthew: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." In union with the Father, he sends

the Holy Spirit, who acts in the soul of each Christian from the moment of Baptism and who assists the Shepherds, raising up the ecclesial community and guiding it, preserving it in the truth and communicating life to it....

By Baptism, all the faithful become not only followers of Christ, but also members of his mystical Body and sharers in his priesthood. All the baptized have received the common priesthood of the faithful, in virtue of which they are called to take part in the mission He came to carry out on earth. Everyone fulfills this mission in their own specific way, in accord with their personal vocation. But we all have to carry it out in close union with the Shepherds, who through the sacrament of Orders have received the ministerial priesthood.

A deep realization of the mystery of the Church increases our love for her

and gives us the desire to serve her as children who are each day more loyal. In the same way, recognizing the divine plan contained in the ministry of the Pope and the other Bishops necessarily leads us to give thanks to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the means God provides to ensure the fidelity of our faith and the moral rectitude of our conduct. With firm faith and charity, we Catholics need to strive to keep ever strong the bonds of union in the Church, expressed in a true and heartfelt faithfulness to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with Peter's Successor. A strong and sincere filial affection for the Roman Pontiff leads one to love and pray intensely for all the Bishops.

Thus, with personal responsibility, with apostolic spontaneity, and with a deep love for the Church, the aspiration that St. Josemaría so liked to use as a prayer will take root in

our hearts: *omnes cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam*. United to Peter and the Church and protected by the powerful intercession of Holy Mary, may we all reach Jesus, the Love of our loves; and may we bring with us all mankind.

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