

## **THE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

The Church is a community of human beings who are still subject to sin, and so it is with humility that she offers herself as the meeting place with the living God. Her existence for two thousand years demonstrates the unceasing mercy and love of God in maintaining her in his grace as a faithful and repentant people. In a world of passing fads and transitory ambitions, she offers the substance of the wisdom of the Gospel and her growing understanding of it through two millennia. She offers the possibility of enriching the present moment with the gifts of a tradition rooted in God's self-revelation and with the hope and meaning for human life that comes from God himself. In a world torn by war and injustice, she celebrates the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gift of himself made eternally present and effective, to make all peoples one with him as head of a reconciled and healed community. In a world of violence against human life, the Church mightily defends life by her works of justice and charity as well as by her advocacy for the protection of all human life.

Of her very nature, the Church is missionary. This means her members are called by God to bring the Gospel by word and deed to all peoples and to every situation of work, education, culture, and communal life in which human beings find themselves. The members of the Church seek to transform society not by power but by persuasion and by example. Through participation in political life – either as voters or as policy holders of public office – they work for increasing conformity of public policy to the law of God as known by human reason and Divine Revelation. This they do especially by showing the coherence of Catholic teaching with the fundamental yearnings and dignity of the human person.

From its foundation, the United States has maintained the freedom of its citizens to worship according to their consciences and has prohibited infringement upon religious freedom by the government. For some, this leads to the conclusion that religion is a purely private matter and should not exercise a public voice in debates about moral issues. That was not the intention of the founders of this nation. Catholics must participate in political life and bring to bear upon it – by their voice and their vote – what they have learned about human nature, human destiny, and God's will for human beings from his self-revelation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant for all times and all places.

This Catechism provides Catholics with a knowledge and understanding of the Gospel that enables them to give an account of their faith to all who they meet with clarity and persuasiveness. They are more effectively enabled to proclaim what God has done for them through his Son in the Holy Spirit, and to explain the rich tradition of belief that is our heritage. This proclamation and catechesis are essential to the new evangelization to which the Church commits herself today: to bring the Gospel of salvation to those near and far.