

## **The Apostolic Tradition:**

Church's Tradition during the Apostolic Age is a very important issue because most of our rituals depend on this tradition. The Apostolic tradition encompasses what the Apostles lived, saw, witnessed and later recorded in the books of the New Testament. The bishops and presbyters, whom the Apostles appointed as their successors, followed their teachings. Those who deviated from this apostolic teaching were cut off from the Church. They were considered heretics for they believed differently from the Apostles and their successors, thus separating themselves from the Church. This brings into focus the Church as the center of unity of all Christians. This is the ecclesiastical or ecclesiological characteristic of Tradition.

The Church is the image and reflection of the Holy Trinity since the three persons of the Holy Trinity live, indwell, and act in the Church. The Father offers His love, the Son offers His obedience, the Holy Spirit His comfort. Only in the historical Church can we see, feel, and live the presence of the Holy Trinity in the World. In describing this reality St. Paul writes: *"So he came and proclaimed the good news: peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near by; for through him we both alike have access to the Father in the one Spirit. Thus you are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household. You are built upon the foundation laid by the Apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built with all the rest into a spiritual dwelling of God"* (Ephesians 2:17-22).

The unity of the Holy Trinity, being the fundamental reality in the Church and of the Church, also requires a real unity among all its members in all generations. All the members of the Church (those who are departed and those who still live on the earth) live in the bond of love and unity through the Holy Trinity. This truth is described by St. Peter: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (1 Peter 2: 9-10).

The Church was established as a historical reality on the day of Pentecost, with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles: *"While the day of Pentecost was running its course they were all together in one place, when suddenly there came from the sky a noise like that of a strong driving wind, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them power of utterance"* (Acts 2: 1-4). Only in this Church, where the Holy Trinity lives and acts constantly could the teaching of Christ, the very revelation of truth, as received and transmitted by the Apostles, abide and be sustained. Thus truth in its fullness does not exist outside the Church, for there is neither Scripture, nor Tradition. This is why St. Paul admonishes the Galatians that even if an angel from heaven preaches another gospel to them, he must be condemned: *"If any man preach any other gospel to you than that you have received let him be condemned"* (1:8-9). And he writes to his disciple Timothy to follow strictly the "precepts of our faith" and the "sound instructions" he received from him and avoid "godless myths" (1 Tim. 4: 4-7). He also admonishes the Colossians to avoid "merely human injunctions and teachings" (2: 22), and to follow Christ: *"Therefore, since Jesus was delivered to you as Christ and Lord, live your lives in union with Him. Be rooted in Him; be built in Him; be consolidated in the faith you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness. Be on your guard; do not let your minds be captured"*

*by hollow and delusive speculations, based on traditions of man-made teaching and centered on the elemental spirits of the universe and not on Christ. For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in Him you have been brought to completion" (Colossians. 2: 6-8).*

As it is clear, Church's Tradition includes all teachings and religious rituals that the Apostles gave to their successors orally through discipleship and Christian life day by day and these teachings and rituals were transmitted generation after generation without any adding or deletion to our day. It is not necessary to find for every teaching or ritual a verse or verses in the Holy Gospel as the Holy Gospel does not include whole disciplines of teachings and rituals but it offers us the faith that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God to have the eternal life through His name (John 20:31). Therefore, the Church considers the tradition is the second source of Christian teaching after the Holy Bible. It is historically accepted that Christian teachings in the early Church were through tradition before writing of any Book of The Holy Gospel or Epistles.

St. Clement, Bishop of Rome (second century A.D.), and probably a disciple of the Apostle Paul himself, described this historical truth: *"The Apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was God's Ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God, and the Apostles with a message from Christ. Both these orderly arrangements, therefore, originate from the will of God. And so, after receiving their instructions and being fully assured through the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as confirmed in faith by the word of God, they went forth, equipped with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, to preach the good news that the Kingdom of God was close at hand. From land to land, accordingly, and from city to city they preached; and from among their earliest converts appointed men whom they had tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers"* (Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 42).

One can clearly see how the message of salvation originating from God the Father was taught by Jesus Christ, witnessed to by the Holy Spirit, preached by the Apostles and was transmitted by them to the Church through the clergy they themselves appointed. This became the "unerring tradition of the Apostolic preaching" as it was expressed by Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop of the fourth century, who is considered the "father" of Church History.