

- (d) A pilgrim people, on a journey to the promised land, the heavenly city (cf. Hebrews 13.14)
- (e) A sign of the reign of God; evidence of God's working in the world; a prophetic witness standing for justice, love, and peace.
- (f) A sacrament – the visible church containing the invisible grace of God; a sanctifying presence in the world.⁵

Have you ever belonged to another community or group? What attracted you to be part of this community or group? What similarities and differences are there compared with the church? When people come together as the church, in what ways do they express its true nature?

Closing Prayer

God of salvation,
 who revealed to our ancestor Jacob
 the house of God and gate of heaven,
 be present also in this place
 whose dedication we celebrate today.
 Build us, who gather here, into a spiritual house,
 a people set apart for your praise and glory,
 so that we, and all who have tasted your goodness,
 may grow towards eternal salvation
 in Christ Jesus, the cornerstone,
 who is one with you and the Holy Spirit
 for ever and ever.

*Celebrating the Christian Year*⁶

⁵ '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.' *Lumen Gentium : Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. – Pope Paul VI, 21 November 1964.

⁶ *Celebrating the Christian Year : Prayers and Resources for Sundays, Holy Days and Festivals : Years A, B, and C* / comp. Alan Griffiths. – Vol. 1 ; Ordinary Time. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004. – Collect for Dedication Festival, Year B(i).

Dedication Festival

Principal Service readings

Genesis 28.11-18	Jacob dreams of a ladder of angels and sets up a pillar at the place
or Revelation 21.9-14	Vision of the heavenly city
Psalms 122	Rejoicing to go to the house of the Lord
1 Peter 2.1-10	Living stones built into a spiritual house
John 10.22-29	'My sheep hear my voice'

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
 speak to our hearts in the stillness,
 keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
 lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
 and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus at the Festival of Dedication

²²At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' ²⁵Jesus answered,

'I have told you, and you do not believe.
 The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me;
²⁶but you do not believe,
 because you do not belong to my sheep.
²⁷My sheep hear my voice.
 I know them, and they follow me.
²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.
 No one will snatch them out of my hand.
²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else,
 and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.'

John 10:22-29 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The dedication festival in Jerusalem celebrated the re-dedication of the Temple in the year 164 BC. Jerusalem had been captured and the Temple desecrated by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, but was reclaimed after a successful rebellion under Judas Maccabaeus. At the re-dedication it was decreed that there should be an annual commemoration (1 Maccabees 4.36-61; 2 Maccabees 10.1-8). This festival, *Hannukah*, is one of the most recent in the Jewish calendar.

According to Acts 3.11 and 5.12 the portico of Solomon, which ran along the eastern side of the Temple, was a gathering place of the first Christians.

In John 7 & 8 there had been discussion about the origin of the Messiah, testimony to the status of Jesus, and descent from Abraham. Jesus has spoken to the people indirectly, by parables; now they press for a clear statement. He has already told the Samaritan woman (4.26) and the blind man (9.26) and Peter has recognised it for himself (6.69). His questioners here do not want to believe in him, but to accuse and trap him.

Many of the people crowding round at the festival would not have been followers of Jesus; Jesus differentiates between those who hear him and those who don't using the idea of sheep and shepherd.

For some people, the idea of Messiah was tied up with a military figure like Judas Maccabaeus. Jesus points to his works as witness. Do works speak louder than words?

Why was Jesus so concerned to assert his identity with the Father?

Quotations

1

The claim that Jesus is the Messiah is not a timeless statement, but relates to God's purpose and plan.

We believe in God / Doctrine Commission. 1987. chap. 6 para. 17²

2

The Church as an often fallible human organization needs our forgiveness, while the Church as the living Christ among us continues to offer us forgiveness.

Henri Nouwen 1932–96

² In *Contemporary Doctrine Classics: We Believe in God; We Believe in the Holy Spirit; The Mystery of Salvation: the Combined Reports /* by the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England. – London : Church House Publishing, 2005. – p.76.

3

The *name* itself shows how much the Church would be committed to the cause of its Lord ... Its source was the Byzantine form *Kyrike* and thus means 'belonging to the Lord' or, in a wider sense, 'house of the Lord.'

Hans Küng b.1928

4

Tolstoy tells the story of a man who stopped to give alms to a beggar. To his dismay he found that he had left his money at home.

Stammering his explanation, he said, 'I am sorry, brother, but I have nothing.' 'Never mind, brother,' was the beggar's answer, 'that too was a gift.' The one word 'brother' meant more to him than money.

John Schmidt

5

The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.

Pope Paul VI, 19 September 1963³

6

As a divine reality inserted into human history, the Church is a kind of sacrament. Its unique relationship with Christ makes it both sign and instrument of God's unfathomable union with humanity and of the unity of human beings among themselves.

Sharing the Light of Faith. #63⁴

Related topics

For further study:

The Church

- (a) A community of believers: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people of God (1 Peter 2.9).
- (b) One body in Christ (Romans 12.5), who remains the head of the church of which we are members. Being built together into a temple, a spiritual dwelling-place for God (Ephesians 2.20-22).
- (c) A servant, sharing God's love in the world, through teaching, healing and reconciling as Christ has done.

³ From Pope Paul VI's opening address at the second session of the Second Vatican Council.

⁴ *Sharing the Light of Faith : National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States.* 1978.