

UNIT II

HOLY COMMUNION

The Sacrament of Life in the Church

12. THE CHURCH GATHERS

In the first eleven lessons, we learned how we enter and become members of the Church through Baptism and Chrismation. Now we are going to see what we do once we are part of God's people, the Church.

The most important thing God's people do is to meet together to worship God. This first step of just coming together is very important. Jesus told us to come together in His Name and He would be there with us. Write His words here: (Matthew 18:20)

So first of all we come together to be with Jesus Christ. Also, by coming together we can meet with all of God's people who live in one place. When all of God's people gather together they make the Church.

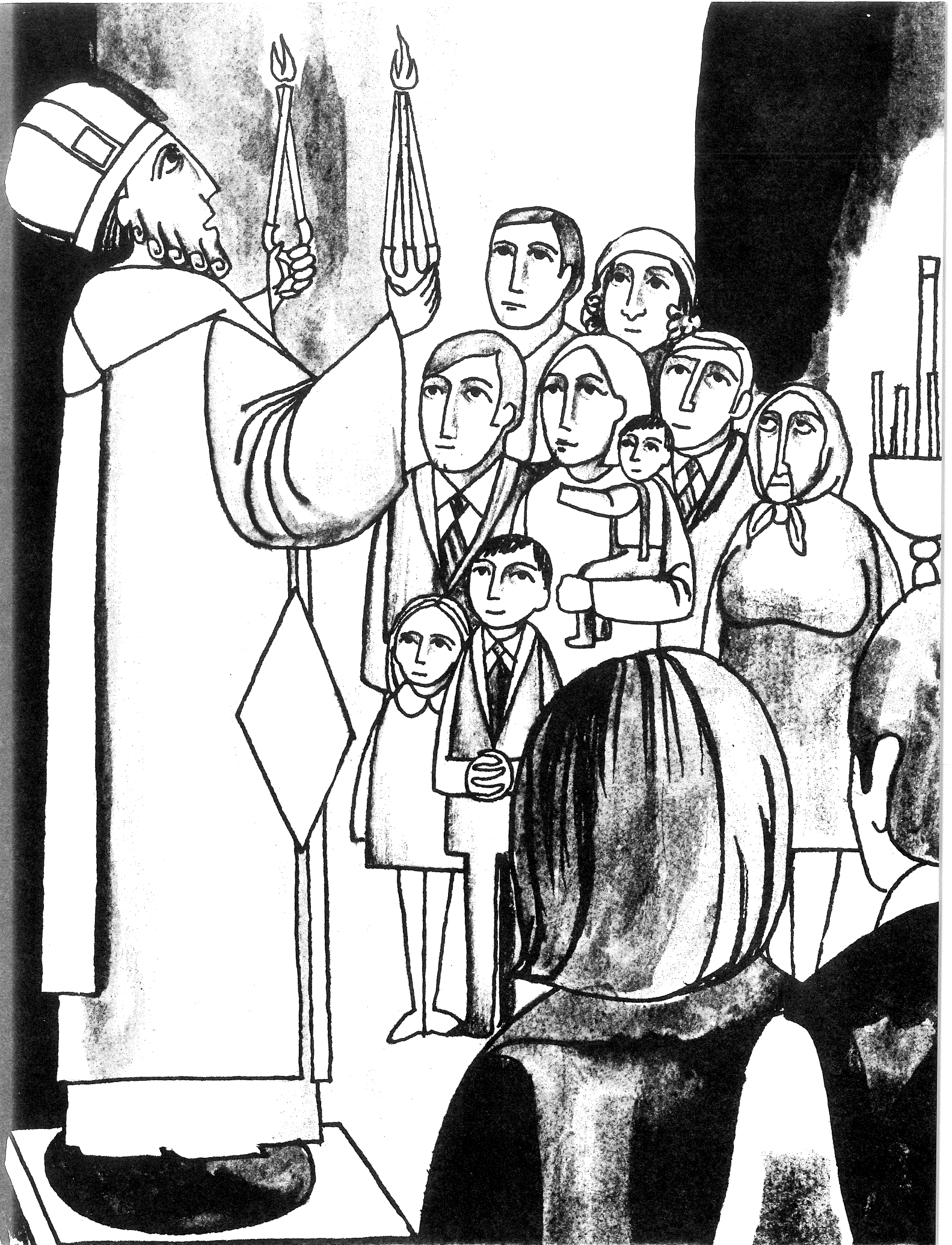
Secondly, the Church meets at a special time. It can meet on any day or at any time, but the most important time it meets is on Sunday for the Divine Liturgy. In a very old book, written close to the time of St. Justin, there were special instructions for Christians which said:

“On every Lord's Day — His special day — come together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins that your sacrifice may be pure.” (Didache)

The Lord's Day is special because it is Sunday — the Day of Resurrection. It is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead and gave new life to us. We meet on Sunday to remember Jesus' Resurrection and our own resurrection with Him in baptism.

Finally, the most important thing we do when we come together on Sunday as the Church, is to worship God. We worship Him by giving thanks to Him, by listening to His Word, and by offering ourselves to Him. God hears our thanks and our words. He receives our gifts and He gives us the best gift possible — a share in His life through Holy Communion. This is really the reason why Christians meet together — to be with God in Holy Communion.

When we come together to worship God, someone is always there to lead us in our prayers and to offer our gifts to God. In most cases this person is our priest. He is the father of our parish, God's family which lives in this city or town. But God's people live in other cities and countries too. The person who connects our parish together



with all other parishes is the bishop. He is the one who ordains our priest and sends him to lead God's people in this place. Another early bishop in the Church, Saint Ignatius, told the Christians in one city:

"You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." (By "Catholic," St. Ignatius means here "complete and perfect, with nothing lacking.")

The priest then stands with us and offers our prayers and our gifts to God. He helps us to know God and to live as good Christians. With our priest and through the bishop, we are connected with God's people in every city and country where there is a Church.

As we prepare to celebrate the Divine Lit-

urgy, we remember all those people who are members of God's Church. When the priest prepares our gifts of bread, wine and water, he remembers all of God's people: the Virgin Mary — the Mother of God, all the saints, our bishop, members of the Church and especially those who are sick or have special needs, and those in the Church who have already departed from this life. The priest cuts pieces of bread from the prosphora — the bread that is used for our offering to God — and places these pieces which remind us of God's Church around a large piece that stands for Jesus Christ.

In a special way then, all of God's people — the living and the departed, the saints from all ages, the people who live near us and those who live thousands of miles away are all gathered together to be with God. This is God's Holy Church.

