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## Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20

1 John 4:11-16

John 17:11-19

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

We have seen in previous weeks how carefully thought out and constructed are Luke's narratives, both theologically and from a literary standpoint. Today's story of the choice of Matthias to fill the place vacated by Judas is no exception. In the Lucan chronology, this gathering of the disciples occurs between the ascension and Pentecost.

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Today's gospel provides further background to the nature of the Church, its mission, and its leaders in Jesus' "high priestly prayer" to the Father on the eve of his death. Scholars have noted the similarity in its structure to the eucharistic prayers used in the liturgy, both by the early Church and still in our own time. Catholic theology once said rather simplistically that Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders at the Last Supper, as if he "ordained" the apostles on that occasion. Without recourse to such an anachronistic understanding, we can nonetheless gain insight from seeing the consecratory nature of this portion of the high priestly prayer of Jesus. He asks the Father to protect his disciples from the evil one, to "consecrate" them in truth, so that they might be faithful to the mission he is entrusting to them ("As you sent me into the world, so I send them into the world"). Remarkably, the core elements of our understanding of Holy Orders (i.e., the divine choice of disciples who are set apart for a special service, a service that is one with the mission of Jesus) are, in rudimentary form, evident in this portion of Jesus' farewell discourse. Catholic theology continues to believe that the hierarchical nature of the Church is rooted in the fruitful nature of Christ's prayer to the Father. He prayed that his followers might persevere in the truth and in fidelity to the mission given them, thanks to the abiding presence of the Spirit, both in the community at large and in the leaders chosen to teach and guide the faithful.



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### **Catholic Doctrine**

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#### ***Hierarchical Nature of the Church***

The term "hierarchy" derives from a Greek root word, hierous, meaning "priest," and connotes a sacred ordering, a rule by priests. We Catholics proclaim Christ as the one high priest who alone is the mediator between God and people. The pope, bishops, priests, deacons, and the entire laity do what they do as members of the Church because they are empowered by Christ. Thus, we believe that it is the Lord himself who establishes and maintains the Church, a visible organism, his body on earth.

Leadership in the Church derives from Christ who empowered his apostles and their successors to proclaim faith and to work toward the kingdom of God. This apostolic succession shares in Christ's own mission and acts on behalf of Christ. What grounds this belief? After his resurrection, Christ appeared to the apostles. As witnesses to the resurrection, the apostles function as foundation stones of the Church. What they experienced in those encounters with the Risen Lord they handed on to those who followed. In other words, our belief is not based on some unsubstantiated hope, but founded upon their witness—a witness that continues from generation to generation through the gift of God.

We believe that the Holy Spirit calls new shepherds forward in every age to participate in the authority and mission of Christ so that all might be oriented toward the kingdom of God.

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