



Introduction: More than a tradition, a living chain

In a world overflowing with religious confusion, where “new churches” arise every week and “alternative gospels” are preached in the name of spiritual freedom, one question becomes the essential criterion for discerning truth from falsehood:

Who laid hands on you?

This is not a technicality. It is a matter of spiritual legitimacy, historical fidelity, and communion with Christ Himself. For from apostolic times, the Church has passed on the faith not only through preaching and Scripture but also through an unbroken chain of spiritual succession: **apostolic succession**.

This article invites you to discover this jewel of Catholic Tradition—not just to understand it, but to love it, defend it, and live it.

1. What is Apostolic Succession?

Apostolic succession is the doctrine that the bishops of the Catholic Church have received their spiritual authority directly from the apostles, through an unbroken chain of valid ordinations, guaranteed by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

“In order that the mission entrusted to the apostles might be continued after their death, they consigned, by will and testament, as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun. [...] Thus, just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, is permanent and is to be transmitted to his successors, so also the apostolic office of the bishops is permanent.” (CCC 861)



2. Biblical Foundation: Not a human invention

Apostolic succession is not a medieval invention. It has direct roots in Scripture:

a. The election of Matthias (Acts 1:15–26)

When Judas betrays Jesus and loses his place among the Twelve, Peter proposes that someone else should be chosen to **“take the place in this ministry and apostleship”** (Acts 1:25). Matthias is elected and **“added to the eleven apostles”** (Acts 1:26). This shows that **the apostolic ministry is transmissible**.

b. Saint Paul and Timothy

Paul writes to his disciple:

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Tim 1:6)

This passage clearly states that the gifts of apostolic ministry are transmitted **by the laying on of hands**, i.e., through valid ordination.

3. History: A golden thread through the centuries

a. The Church Fathers

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, as early as the second century, affirms in his work *Against Heresies*:

“We can enumerate those who were appointed bishops by the apostles, and their successors down to our own time. This is the surest proof of truth.”



The early Church understood clearly that **the validity of teaching and sacraments depended on this apostolic continuity.**

b. The lineage of Peter

The Church of Rome, for instance, can trace an **unbroken line of bishops** from **Saint Peter to the current Pope**. This is a sign of unity, fidelity, and authenticity. It is not about human power, but **spiritual authority transmitted by Christ**.

4. Why does it matter today?

a. A guarantee of authenticity

In a world full of “custom-made” spiritualities, apostolic succession is **the seal of guarantee** that a Christian community is in communion with the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

b. A source of unity

Where apostolic succession exists, there is a **deep unity in faith, sacraments, and pastoral governance**. This unity is especially visible in communion with the Pope and the College of Bishops.

c. A defense against heresy

Ancient heretics could not prove succession. As Saint Irenaeus said: “If they cannot show the line of their bishops from the apostles, then they are outside the Church.”

5. Which Churches have it and which do not?

a. Churches with valid apostolic succession

1. **Roman Catholic Church**

- Valid succession, valid sacraments, full communion with the Pope.

2. **Eastern Orthodox Churches**



- Valid succession and valid sacraments, though not in full communion with Rome.

3. **Oriental Orthodox Churches** (like the Copts or Armenians)

- Also possess valid succession.

4. **Assyrian Church of the East**

- Valid succession but separated for many centuries.

5. **Some “High Church” Anglican or Continuing Anglican communities**

- Some questionable cases, but the Catholic Church does not recognize most of these ordinations as valid.

b. Churches without apostolic succession

- **Protestant Churches** (Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, etc.)

- They broke with succession during the Reformation, and their ministers were not validly ordained by bishops in apostolic line.

Conclusion: Without apostolic succession, there is no valid Eucharist, and without the Eucharist, there is no sacramental presence of Christ among the faithful.

6. Practical Applications: What does this mean for you?

a. **Seek a Church with apostolic succession**

This is not about personal preference or sympathy. It's about belonging to **the Church that Christ Himself founded**. If you are in the Catholic Church, you are in communion with the apostles.

b. **Pray for your bishops**

They are the **successors of the apostles**. Even though they may be weak or sinful, their mission comes from Christ. They need our prayer and support.

c. **Live in obedience to apostolic authority**

Faith is not a personal interpretation. Living under apostolic succession means living **under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who acts through the hierarchical Church**.



7. Theological and Pastoral Guide to Living Apostolic Succession

I. From the perspective of personal faith

- Reaffirm your belief in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.
- Trust in the teaching of your bishop in communion with the Pope.

II. From sacramental life

- Participate in sacraments validly celebrated by priests with apostolic succession.
- Seek Confession, the Eucharist, and Confirmation, aware that they are **real channels of grace** because they come from Christ through succession.

III. From community life

- Do not isolate yourself in “parallel Catholic” communities or movements that despise legitimate hierarchy.
- Ensure that every apostolate, catechesis, or spiritual activity is in communion with your bishop.

IV. From the perspective of evangelization

- Boldly proclaim that **the true Church is not a vague idea but a visible reality**, founded on Peter and the apostles, with succession down to our days.

Conclusion: A promise of fidelity

Apostolic succession is not just another doctrine. It is the **backbone of the Church**. It is the testimony that God has not abandoned His people. Amid doctrinal confusion, division, and spiritual self-sufficiency, apostolic succession is a light, a certainty, an anchor.

Because when the priest lifts up the Body of Christ at Mass, he does so **through a chain of hands that reaches all the way back to Christ Himself**.



And you? Are you united to that chain or outside it?

“He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me.”
(Luke 10:16)

There lies the key. What we believe, what we celebrate, what we live, **must pass through the apostles and their successors**, or it does not come from Christ.