

## 8. We believe One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The new Catechism of the Church tells us the Church that we say we believe in 'is built on the foundation of the Apostles', 'a community of Faith, Hope and Charity.' The Church came into being when some fishermen of Galilee met Jesus and allowed themselves to be won over by his invitation 'Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men.'

So what is this One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? Benedict, in his book, 'I believe' directs us to look at Pentecost as a starting point, he calls it 'a feast of Catholicity', for here we see a new community that speaks all languages and unites all people into one community, the family of God. The catholicity of the church, as we proclaim in the creed, is therefore something that we have already been given, rather than something we are trying to achieve; but adds Benedict, 'it is also something we must start out again to discover! The early fathers made a strong link between catholicity and unity, a link they see in terms of faith and doctrine, a church spread across the world, *yet* one family... with one mind and one heart' says St Ireneus, 'with the same preaching, teaching and tradition as if she had but one mouth.'

At the heart of the oneness we profess is, of course, God himself. The source of the Church's unity, is the unity found in the Trinity of Persons, and as such, unity is in short 'the essence of the Church.'

(*Unitatis Redintegratio*) Bearing this in mind, we recognise that from the beginning there has always been diversity in the Church, and later on division and even schism. We only need to turn to the writings of St. Paul to see this. Paul exhorts the early Christian communities 'to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (*Eph4:3*), those bonds being charity' for he says, 'charity binds everything together in perfect harmony.' (*Col 3:14*)

Of course the unity of the Church depends on more than just charity; the church teaches us that there are visible bonds or signs of communion which make the Church one. So what are these bonds:- (scripture of course) then

- i) The profession of one faith as received from the Apostles
- ii) The common celebration of the sacraments
- iii) The Apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God's family.

All this must be set against the claim 'that the sole church of Christ' is the one Our Lord, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and govern this Church constituted and organised as a society in this present world', this church, wait for it, 'subsists in the Catholic Church.' Then the 2nd Vatican Council would say that! This does not mean however, that the modern catholic church dismisses all the other churches, which show 'the same elements of sanctification and truth', including people like us, the Anglican communion!

Which brings us to our belief that the Church is Holy. The Church is not Holy by herself, no, the Church is made Holy by Jesus Christ. The Catechism states that, as a matter of faith the Church is held to be unfailingly Holy, because 'Christ, the Son of God, with the Father and the Spirit is... Holy.' Christ loves the Church as his bride, and so it was that he gave himself up for her, and so sanctifies her. The Church is the Holy people of God, and her members are called, as Luke tells us in Acts – Saints. (*Acts 9: 13*) a holiness the Church is called to share with all peoples. We call the Church Holy even if that holiness is often found to be imperfect! The Lord calls all members of the Church to be Holy, yet the Catechism reminds us that we are all sinners, and that includes priests and bishops, for it says 'the weeds of sin will be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time'!

For a sound Anglican perspective, we turn as always to Prof. Macquarrie, who taking up this theme of holiness, says, 'here it is very much a case of more or less' and the Church has often been less rather than more holy, and 'in many particular instances, the church utterly falls short of holiness. 'For Macquarrie the holiness of the church is not 'an other worldly holiness that keeps its hands clean'; he draws on the example of the saints, whose holiness shows not 'an escape from this world' but an obedience in his or her situation, like Mary, who says to god 'Let it be according to your word.' Macquarrie says the church 'is a communion of the saints' and the achievements of the saints remain a constant testimony and encouragement to the reality of grace in the church.

He reminds us that the visible embodiment of the church's holiness is its sacramental life. He says the sacraments are 'the growing points', where 'the divine grace sanctifies the Church and conforms its life to Christ's,'... commanding a 'very special respect and reverence'... as 'the institutional forms... That protect and foster the growth of holiness first in the Church and then in all humanity.

So whether we are Roman Catholics or Anglicans, or Orthodox for that matter, we go on believing the Church is Holy, for as Paul VI reminded the Church at the time of the Council, 'she herself has no other life but the life of grace.' Telling the faithful that if we live her life, we too are sanctified, if we move away from her life they we fall into sin.' I think that tells us something very important about the way we live our life in

relationship to the Church, underlining not only just how important our membership of the Church is, but how important is the sacramental life we share together.

Returning to our belief that the Church is Catholic, above all this is in the sense that we believe in it's universality, there is a totality about it. Catholic first in the sense that Christ is present. It was St. Ignatius of Antioch who wrote 'where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church. 'Second she is catholic because she has been sent out by Our Lord with a universal mission to all humanity. The new catechism tells us that out of all the churches 'constituted after the model of the universal church', is formed that 'one unique Catholic Church', adding that particular Churches are fully catholic through their communion with each other. And it's somewhere around this area that we can see the problem that the catholic church has with Anglicanism. For many Anglicans this doesn't seem to matter, communion with Rome as the ultimate goal for unity, yet it was St. Maximus the Confessor who reminded the Christian church, that from 'the Incarnate Word's descent to us, all Christian churches have held Rome to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Saviour's promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her.' He was of course writing before the Reformation, and indeed before the schism with the churches of the East ( the Orthodox). As catholic Anglicans we continue to. profess our belief in the catholicity of our Church and our theologians of a past generation were able to set out a respectable account of how the term could be applied to our spiritual mother.

So it is that Macquarrie speaks of catholicity as 'universality'. To this end, he says, the Church must be 'an open, rather than a closed society', after the manner of St. Paul, he speaks of 'inclusive unity with diversity' which in turn he says 'constitutes the catholicity of the Church as universality.' He tells us that to proclaim belief in the church's catholicity, we must hold the authentic, universal faith, a faith that from New Testament times required consensus, the agreement of all; a faith embodied in the catholic creeds and the early councils of the Church which have been universally recognised.

Macquarrie reminds us that the creeds and councils aimed at excluding error, leaving room for freedom and development in theological discussion, however 'the structure is there to protect and foster a living faith. I Ultimately we are given a structural form, he says, 'that both expresses and protects the truly catholic being of the church,' but he says 'we must hold the balance... between spontaneity and the fixity of forms!'

Finally, We believe the church is Apostolic. As catholicity and unity go together the fact that both dimensions of the Church become visible to us in the persons of the Holy Apostles, tells us something important about the nature and fundamental characteristic of the Church – she is and must be, as we have already touched upon, Apostolic; built on the foundation of the Apostles, those witnesses chosen by Jesus to continue his work, the work of the Father, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' (*John 20:21*) Macquarrie very much connects the church's catholicity with her apostolicity, when he speaks of the apostolic church as the authentic church. From the beginning the apostolic church continued the teaching and practice of the Apostles, and faithfulness to the Apostles appears to be mark of the New Testament church, as we read in Acts, 'they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching'. (*Acts 2:42*) In associating the church's catholicity with her apostolicity, Macquarrie says 'whereas catholicity indicates the authenticity of the church's practice and teaching by pointing to the consensus of Christians throughout the world, apostolicity has to do with the extension of the church throughout time, it's continuity and identity through the ages. Though Macquarrie believes the church must change in many ways, 'it can claim to be the Church of Jesus Christ only if it has retained at least a minimal degree of continuity with Christ, first through his apostles and then through the generations of their successors.' As an Anglican he reminds us that the note of apostolicity for the church has its own embodiment or institutional form to protect it, namely the episcopate, which ensures the continuity of the Church's faith and practice as received by the first Apostles. Modern catholic teaching naturally underlines the importance of the episcopate too, telling us that as Christ promised to remain with the Apostles always, continuity in the mission and faith of the apostles is safeguarded by the principle of Apostolic succession – those appointed as successors to the original 12, i.e. our bishops assisted by their priests. This ministry of succession is continued through the sacrament of Holy Order, ordination. one of the matters which has, needless to say caused some problems for present day Anglicanism.

So we believe in 'One, Holy, catholic and Apostolic Church, and as we consider that belief, I suppose we need to ask where do the recent actions of the Church of England put us in terms of authenticity and indeed legitimacy? Indeed, what kind of Church can we claim to be as we continue to make the same profession of faith, Sunday by Sunday? I think we'll leave that question open for today!