

## "SIZE IS NOT ENOUGH"

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic of the Christian Church in our time is its catholicity, its universality. The word "ecumenical" is more than an overnight guest in our vocabulary. The term is here to stay. Living as we do in a global village, God, of late, has been bunching his people together within the arms of his encircling love. Mergers and overtures for merger are the order of the day. And the end is not yet in sight. All of us rejoice in this coming together.

However, in such an hour we would do well to remember that we are committed not to a catholic church - a universal church - but to a holy catholic church. We say this when we affirm the creed: "I believe...in the holy catholic church". Both adjectives belong to the church's life. Catholicity has to do with the size and the spread of the church. Holiness suggests the quality of life that is being extended. A church that was only catholic could well be nothing more than a sprawling mass of ingeniously organized religion. A church that was only holy would tend to be insular, pietistic, irrelevant. Holy and catholic.

But it's the call to be "holy" that suffers from neglect today. The assumption is too widely held that by re-organizing at the institutional level we reduce the need for commitment at the personal level.

### DEVELOPMENT

Let's admit right here at the start that the word "holy" puts us off! In popular usage it stands for a prudishness with which we would rather not be identified. None of us wishes to be known as a "Holy Joe" or a "Holy Jane". None of us want to be accused of a "holier than thou" attitude. (Although the current passion to be "unholier than thou" is hardly an improvement.)

Yet, we cannot get away from the fact that this word "holy" has impeccable New Testament credentials. No less than sixty times in the New Testament believers in Christ are referred to as the holy ones - the saints. Incidentally the term is never found in the singular. Apparently one cannot be a saint alone.

Holiness, the theologians tell us, is the primary attribute of God. It speaks to the "onlyness," the "apartness", the "otherness", the "transcendence" of God. It represents all that makes God, God. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty".....this is what we sang as we came into the service this morning. And apparently He would have it the foremost attribute of His people. "Be ye holy, for I am holy" is a line in First Peter. We may not look it, we may not like it, but we are called to be saints.

### HOW TO EXPRESS THIS HOLINESS

But how is this holiness to be expressed? Some suggest that we do it by close adherence to a running list of do's and don'ts - mostly don'ts. No smoking. No drinking. No dancing. No theater. No lipstick. A mountain preacher in Appalachia, disturbed that Sunday sports were diminishing his congregation, expounded on the words from John, "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world" by saying "If that don't mean baseball, what do it mean?" I'm afraid I'd have a tough time following that preacher as many of you would, too.

To be sure, discipline belongs to the Christian life, and standards of personal conduct are of great importance. But such legalism is too easy, too negative, too much centered on the individual and too unaware of social responsibility.

Other seek to express their relationship to the divine through the use of some

outward sign or demarcation. Here one thinks of the farmer in Lancaster County who paints the bumpers on his automobile black; the cab driver who displays religious statuary on his dash; the baseball player who crosses himself at home plate each time he comes up to bat; or the basketball player who does the same at the foul line before taking a free throw; the family that displays a religious motto prominently in the home. It's important to be willing to stand up and be counted, but all such outward designations in and of themselves are far from convincing.

The classical Roman Catholic view reserves the term "saint" for a canonized individual. Most of these, in turn, come from the ranks of men and women who have taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The late Pope Pius XII addressing a crowd of teen-age Italian girls in St. Peter's square sought to encourage them in the direction of Holy Orders by remarking that "the state of virginity by its excellence is superior to that of matrimony". Protestants, however, as many Catholics also, are not at all convinced that it is nobler to be a Sister than a mother.

WHAT IS A SAINT      What then is a saint - a holy man - in the New Testament sense of that term? I think we could offer this definition: a saint is one in whom the Holy Spirit is producing an over-growing resemblance to Jesus Christ. Sainthood has its active side. Oswald Chambers suggests that the one mark of the saint is the moral originality that springs from his abandonment to Christ. The Christian style of life should be marked by initiative, spontaneity, imagination, the willingness to seek new answers and approaches to old problems.

Ministers, as you know, are fond of talking about the amount of work they do. Despite our much speaking on this point, Life Insurance companies however regard us as good risks. I tangled with a layman once on this subject and he put me down by saying, "Reverend, I do more things by accident in one day than you do on purpose". The saint does not calculate, but he amazes by the scope and number of his achievements. Sainthood has its active side.

And it also has its passive side. This is the side we Christians in the western world tend to overlook. Perhaps this is so because the active virtues of the Hebrew-Christian heritage are more congenial to the competitive nature of our free enterprise. One can be sure of a warm reception at any Trade Association or Chamber of Commerce meeting by extolling such virtues as thrift, forethought, industry, enthusiasm or hard work. Those words from Proverbs provide us with a text custom fitted for the busy world of buy and sell, "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways and be wise".

It remains for us to discover, with the help of our brethren from the East, what Horace Bushnell called, "The Efficiency of the Passive Virtues". These include forbearance, forgiveness, tolerance, endurance and patience. The beatitudes make much of the passive qualities of the Christian life. Jesus exalted the meek, the mourners, the persecuted, the reviled. In St. Paul's list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit he commends love, peace, long suffering, meekness, and temperance.

Jesus exercises his hold on men not alone for what he achieved but for what he endured as well. Peter was impressed by the passive side of Christ. Perhaps it all began that day when the burly fisherman came up to Jesus and asked, "How often must my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Someone was on Peter's back. Perhaps an adversary of long standing. Perhaps someone who knew a weakness in the disciple and lost no opportunity to exploit it. Five times now

he had allowed his tormentor to strike without retaliation. How much more would he have to take? Calmly Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee until seven times: but until seventy times seven". In other words, Peter would have to forbear indefinitely.

That Peter was struck by Jesus' ability to control his reactions to life comes through clearly in his first Epistle. Somewhat mellowed by the years, he wishes to commend Christ to those who had not known the Master in the flesh. With the full range of miracle and preaching to choose from he seeks to commend Christ as one:

"who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously".

CLOSING Today is World-Wide Communion Sunday. Today we pause to acknowledge and to celebrate the catholicity, the universality of the Christian Church. And rightly so. From Boston to Bombay....from Berlin to Bangkok... Christian people are kneeling to receive the Sacrament. But the world is not as likely to be impressed, I fear, by our catholicity as by our holiness, by our breadth and by our depth. The saint is still the unanswerable logic of the Christian enterprise. It is more impressed by quality than by quantity, by that person who is producing an over-growing resemblance to the style of life revealed in the man from Nazareth.

Size is not enough. Our commitment renewed today as we ~~kneel here at the Altar, joining hands with others around the world,~~ receive the Sacrament....our commitment is to a church that is both holy and catholic. But the church will only be holy as each member of it takes his sainthood seriously.

PRAYER Lord, we bless thy name for the far flung company of faith within whose fellowship we stand.

Grant us depth to match our breadth, and the sanctity of life that will make our size serviceable to thee in this hour of mankind's history. Amen

Let us be still, and remember Jesus as he was then, powerful to heal, to speak, to save. Let us think of him as he is now, powerful as the Spirit of God among us - to lift us up out of the low places and set our feet once again on the high way.

Draw us, Lord, to him who is the perfect incarnation of thyself, that our power may more and more be tamed by the power of his love, that we may reflect his way in our ways.

Lord, we bless thy name for the far flung company of faith within whose fellowship we stand and for this day of celebration which ties us to others around our world.

Grant, we beseech thee, depth to match our breadth, and the sanctity of life that will make our size serviceable to thee in this hour of the history of mankind. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light and where there is sadness, joy. In the name and spirit of Christ.