

Wednesday in Judica, the 31st Day of Lent
March 24, 2010


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University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✠ Jesu juva ✠

UNAM, SANCTAM, CATHOLICAM

Psalm 5; Hebrews 10:19-25; John 2:13-22

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

 onight we take up a portion of the creed that we don't normally spend a lot of time talking about, and that portion deals with the Church. In this article we confess that we believe in the Holy Christian (i.e. catholic) Church, the communion of saints; or in the words of the Nicene Creed, in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. But did you ever think it odd to say "I believe in" the Church? Seems like a strange thing to say, doesn't it?

And yet it takes faith to believe in the Church as it is described here; for the Church does not appear as we confess it to be in the Creed, at least not to mortal eyes. When you look at any particular congregation and the people of whom it is composed, you don't see a holy Church. What you see is a collection of people, some of whom might be considered holy and pious, but some also who are rude, some who are difficult to get along with, and some who just don't seem to be all that outwardly Christian. You will also see at times hypocrisy, anger, dissension; in short, you will see sinners. And you might say "is this really a communion of saints?"

And what about oneness? When you look at the Church is that what you see? Or do you see factions and denominations and a great amount of disunity? And what of catholic (note I'm talking small "c" catholic, a unity not only in this time and place, but in every time and place)? Do you see that? Or do you see churches that depart from what has been handed down to them because of the times in which we live and the societal pressures with which we must deal? And what of apostolic? When you look at the churches of Christendom you will find that they all claim to be apostolic, but so many of them do not actually hold to what the apostles taught. No, to our mortal eyes, the Church does not appear to be one or to be holy or catholic or apostolic.

And yet the Church is all of these things. She is holy because her members have been made holy by Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism, and because they continue to repent of their sins and receive forgiveness and sanctity through the absolution of the Gospel. She is one Church, because despite the heresies and divisions which spring up within her, there is always a unity of those who truly have faith and confess the truth. Those who depart from the truth, though they

remain outwardly members of a church, have actually left the true Church. So the true Church is hidden to a degree, though not entirely as she is visible in her true members. She is catholic, for the true and hidden Church holds the same faith that Christians have always and everywhere believed. And her practices flow from that which she has received from those who have gone before. And the true Church is apostolic, for she holds fervently, above all else, to the Apostolic Word. This is the source of her doctrine, of her life and of the grace she has received and dispenses to her children. Yes, the Church is this way in reality, though this reality is often clouded and hidden to us. Hence we say we believe in it, for we cannot clearly see it.

We also believe the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We believe because she is one in her confession of Christ and of His Word. She has not held to any other Gospel, but only to the true Gospel which gives life and light to us. We believe her because she is holy, for she is the bride of Christ who shares in what her husband gives to her, and is made to be as He has called her. We believe her because she is unified throughout time and space with all true Christians, and that they are part of her. And above all we believe her because she is apostolic, faithful to the Word of Christ.

A church that is not apostolic cannot be holy, cannot be one, cannot be catholic. This is the key. The Word, as I said before, must be the source of all she teaches, of all for which she hopes, and of all she gives.

And this is why the Church continues to be important to our lives and to our faith. She is the dispenser of the good gifts which Christ has given her, both through her ministry and through the mutual consolation of her children one to another as they confess their faith one to another and encourage and pray for one another.

The book of Hebrews puts it this way, as you heard tonight. The Church is the place where those who have had their hearts sprinkled and bodies washed in the pure waters of Baptism, assemble together. This is where through the Word of God they receive the exhortation of the Word of God through the preaching of it, where their confession is strengthened, and where love and good works are stirred. And this is the place where we, through the intercession of Christ our High Priest are given the blessing to enter, by means of His flesh and blood in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, into the Most Holy place, the presence of God Himself. Or as John has shown us tonight, the temple is Christ's body; and we enter into that Temple in the body of His Church who is united with Him as one flesh.



By the gifts that Christ gives, by His washing and by His Word, by His flesh and by His blood, the Church delivers Christ Himself to you, and the working of the Holy Spirit in your hearts. Here we find the multitude of His mercy for us. And this truth, these benefits, outweigh everything else that we see in the church's members that is mundane, or irritating, or even sinful. We do not forsake the assembling

of ourselves together, for here we find not just one another, but Christ who makes us one with Himself and thereby with one another too. And so we confess that we do believe in the holy Church and say with the Psalmist: "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple." Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠

