



“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

—I Cor 10:17

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ON BEING CATHOLIC

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“According to the whole” is the meaning of the Greek phrase “kata holos,” the origin of the word “catholic.”

The following are simply some personal reflections on living and believing “according to the whole.”

The origin and model of Christians’ “wholeness” is the Triune God, a unity of Three Persons.

In the fourth century, the Cappadocians—a group of Christian theologians in what is now Turkey—devoted their lives to the belief that God cannot be subdivided and exists as a community of Three distinct yet united Persons in relationship.

This went against the prevailing Platonic philosophy which held that all things in the cosmos are ordered in a top-down fashion. It would have been easy for many Christians at that time, therefore, to adhere to a top-down ordering of the Persons of the Trinity. But the Cappadocians prevailed upon Christian thinking, and the creed that we proclaim each week is a fruit of their labor.

When you and I

gather each week for the Eucharistic liturgy, we gather as distinct and unique persons and yet united in our story of salvation history, in our creed, in our Eucharistic meal...and also in our God who is both One and Three.

To presume that one voice or one path is normative for others is to deny the distinctions of Persons within the Holy Trinity. Rather, honoring the uniqueness of persons and the unity of the whole is our call and invitation.

Pastors have the weighty responsibility of overseeing and fostering God-given gifts to the community, even embracing those which sometimes seem to be in tension.

This is not unlike life in any family. Parents, grandparents, or other family members strive to foster both unity and the personal fulfillment of each family member at the same time.

Because life and faith “according to the whole” rarely seem tidy or easy, I believe that “catholic-ness” is less an “ism” or state of being

than a way of thinking, acting, and believing. We are only catholic if we continue to become catholic.

Being catholic means having the common good at heart. Being catholic also means being authentic and unique persons, just as the Son is uniquely the Son and the Spirit is uniquely the Spirit.

I am only whole together with you. And I help make you whole. Those missing also help make us whole, and we are only truly catholic together with them.

The whole is different than the majority. The majority is concerned with

efficiency and allows a dominant group to be normative for all. But the whole is concerned with

both unity and the uniqueness of each person.

Let us see our God, then, an ever-welcoming Tri-One whole, as the source of our catholic-ness. And let us ourselves live and believe “according to the whole.”

There is no “only child” in the Catholic family.