

## Monastic Scribe IX: August 20, 2021

### ARE WE CATHOLIC/catholic?

The marks of the church, so we learned in grade school, are to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Today's church may be limping in all four areas but I would like to talk today specifically about being catholic. As people know, the word "catholic" means universal. The church is not to be a local sect. It is a body (The Body of Christ we believe) that transcends all nations, ethnic groups, genders, races. And as the "sacrament of Jesus Christ" the church should show visibly that it is truly catholic. It fails here and there, now and then, but must keep on aiming at being truly catholic.

I fear that the Catholic Church in the United States is showing signs of being more American than catholic. The political divisions of being conservative or liberal characterize the two great splits in the American Church today. This is apparent in people's attitudes towards Pope Francis, in liturgy, in the priorities shown in values and social positions. Individualism, consumerism, materialism, racism, nationalism have their impact on our church. The American flag and the pledge of allegiance seem to be more religious to some people than discipleship of Jesus Christ and the vision that the Catholic tradition enshrines.

One side wants the Pope to make changes quickly in the line of a liberal democracy, e.g. rights of women. He often disappoints. Three years ago the Synod on the Amazon okayed the ordination of married men to the priesthood and the ordination to the diaconate of women. In his final exhortation, he neither allowed or forbade these requests.

Privately he said that he believed, at this time, that it would lead to polarization of the church. You may disagree with such a decision but the Pope, as all Popes, is concerned with the church of over a billion people over the earth and is concerned about possible schisms. Perhaps he is wrong but try to understand how he sees his ministry.

The other side believes the Pope is changing dogma and tradition. They don't like change and many believe the Second Vatican Council changed too much. Recently the Pope decreased permissions to use the Tridentine rite of the Mass. Many conservatives feel outraged. But the Pope believes the unity of the Church's rite of Eucharist is essential for preserving the true theology of what the church and Eucharist are about. It is mostly Americans and French who want the old Mass.

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The Church right now, as an institution, is in a mess. The sexual abuse crisis and subsequent cover-ups have done tremendous damage. People have a right to be angry, but also to be sad about their church. We need to lament the abuse of power in our Church. We need to stand up for what is right. What will come of the Church is uncertain as it is likely to change and be different.

But I ask you to consider that Catholicism holds a lot more that is positive and beautiful. The Church is not the Bishops' church. It is "our church." However, it is also not an American church. Seventy years ago Catholics struggled to be accepted as fully American. Now we are often no different than any other Americans in accepting a political view of Christianity with such values as consumerism and greed. Knowing that our fellow Catholics are African, Asian, South American, European, Australian, as well as Black, Latino and other minorities here at home opens our minds and hearts to appreciate the gift of our catholic faith tradition. We can learn from all of them how to be better Catholic Christians. Catholics ought to be proud of their faith even if it is a wounded and sinful body of people. We need to be both Catholic and catholic.

What can you do? First get to know your faith better. Get past the inadequate version of children. Learn more about churches throughout the world. Then stand up for what you believe. Storm the bishops with pressure on them to wake up and be more prophetic. What are you doing now? You can let me know at [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org) We are church and we need to support and encourage one another.

**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.