

Friends, one of the principal marks of Christ's Church, according to the Nicene Creed, is catholicity. The term "catholic" is derived from the Greek "kata holos" (according to the whole) and thus designates something like universal or all-embracing. As such, this ecclesial mark is closely tied to that of unity. Since God wants to draw all people to himself, his outreach is properly all-englobing and so must be the vehicle by which he affects this gathering-in. Accordingly, the Church of Jesus Christ cannot be limited to any one nation, any single region, any particular ethnic group, or the speakers of any one language exclusively. In fact, it is most especially the place where the tensions produced by these divisions are actively overcome. The Church is an agent and instrument of reconciliation, within itself and outside of itself.

Another dimension of the Church's catholicity is this: it has, in the words of Cardinal Francis George, "all the gifts Christ wants to give us." There is not only a "here comes everybody" quality about the Catholic Church, but also a "here is everything" quality as well, for it includes Scripture, the liturgy, a richly complex theological tradition, sacraments, the Eucharistic presence, Mary and the saints, the apostolic succession of the bishops, papal authority, mysticism, a deep commitment to social justice, etc. The "kata holos" principle powerfully holds sway with respect to the inner life of the Church. A mentor of mine once commented that part of the genius of Catholicism is that "we never threw anything away." In the great storehouse of the Church, the full wealth of Christ can be found, the catholic totality.

My own "Catholic sensibility" as a teacher, preacher, and evangelist—the theme of this issue of "Evangelization & Culture"—is, I hope, a reflection of these qualities of the Church, drawing out the variegated riches of the great tradition, and through them, drawing the whole world to Christ and his Mystical Body. In the pages, you'll explore some of my own theological writings, as well as the saints, spiritual masters, and mentors who played a key role in my own spiritual and intellectual formation. Some names may be familiar to you—Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Merton, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, John Henry Newman—and others you may be just encountering for the first time. But you will not only find philosophy, theology, and spirituality; you will also encounter Scripture and preaching, music and film, art and architecture, poetry and prose—a breadth of articulation that speaks down the ages and across languages and cultures.

To evangelize in our own time and place, drawing especially the "nones" into the beauty and truth of Catholicism, we have to be nimble; we have to know what to use and to be able to quickly reach into this "Grandma's attic" of the Church to use it. But we can't do this if we don't know our own tradition and study it. So read, read, read; learn the great tradition; and cultivate a Catholic sensibility that is "kata holos," appreciating the whole range of the Church's beauty and wisdom. For the Church Catholic is not meant ultimately to fuss over a particular aspect of its own inner life or limit itself to a particular cultural expression; rather, it is meant to go out, in all of the splendor of its diversity and strength of its unity, to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

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