

***Nothing More Beautiful***  
**Year Three, Session Three**  
**“The Church We Believe in is Catholic”**  
***Catechetical Reflection***

**Most Rev. Richard Smith, Archbishop of Edmonton**  
**February 17, 2011**

In this third evening dedicated to the mystery of the Church we have reflected upon the Church as catholic. By this term we mean universal, or all-embracing, as both our speakers have highlighted. Indeed they themselves – Cardinal Rodriguez of Tegucigalpa in Honduras and Leslie-Anne Knight of Rome – represent in both their persons and work this universality of the Body of Christ. From their presentations I would like to highlight three points for our reflection.

First, the Church of Christ is universal. In his catechetical presentation Cardinal Rodriguez pointed out that this universality of the Church stems from the nature of Jesus Christ’s own mission. As we have said before, the will of God is to save all people, and for this purpose he has sent his only Son, born of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our salvation. Jesus is, therefore, the one and only Saviour of all people. Since the Church is his Body, it must somehow participate in this universal reach of Christ’s saving act on the Cross. This is why the Church, particularly in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, speaks of the Church as “the universal sacrament of salvation” (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 1, 9, 48; *Gaudium et Spes* 45). Let’s break this expression down for the purposes of understanding.

We have noted in earlier presentations that, by salvation, we mean the recovery of the unity that was lost between God and humanity by the sin of our first parents and the multiplicity of human sin that followed in its wake. It means being brought by Christ into that mysterious unity that is the Trinity and thus drawn into union with one another, a union we call the Church. In the Church’s tradition, “sacrament” means both sign and instrument. We are accustomed to using the term in relation to the seven sacraments of the Church, which both signify and bring about our encounter with God’s saving grace in Christ. But the term can also be applied analogously to the Church. Composed of members who have been touched and transformed by the mercy of Christ, the Church is formed as a unity of disciples. In this way it serves as a sign of the unity which God wills for all people. It is at the same time an instrument of this unity because, through its sacramental celebrations, God’s saving and unifying grace pours forth in the world. Finally, precisely as this sacrament the Church must be universal. Since Christ’s saving mission is for all people, the Church must be present in every place so that it may serve for everyone as the sign and instrument God calls her to be.

From this flows the second point I wish to highlight from the Cardinal’s presentation. The Church, as catholic, must be missionary. We have already seen that this arises from the nature of Christ’s mission and of the Church as sacrament of his saving grace. Her missionary nature springs also from the very mandate given to the Church by the Lord: “Go and make disciples of

all nations..." (cf. *Matthew* 28:19) When one has been touched and transformed by the love of Christ, one cannot help but want to be missionary. This is "good news" that we cannot not want to share. The disciple of the Lord is one in whose heart the words of St. Paul to Timothy resonate deeply: God "wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth." (cf. *1 Timothy* 2:3-4) The truth is his saving love revealed and active in Christ. To make this good news known, the Church reaches out in mission.

Now, we may be accustomed to think in terms of travel to faraway places when we think of the Church's missionary work. This is, of course, true, but it is not the whole story. We are called to be missionaries on our own streets and in our own neighbourhoods. Many have yet to know Christ. Many others are suffering from a variety of hardships and need to know the assurance that Christ is near in his power and in his love. We can communicate this in words. More effectively, however, we communicate it in actions of charity.

This brings me to the third point for our reflection, and it is taken from Lesley-Anne Knight's witness presentation. The Church is called to act in love as a sign of its catholicity. Lesley-Anne spoke very movingly of the work of *Caritas Internationalis*, which seeks in all that it does "to be a sign of God's all-embracing love for humanity." The catholicity of the Church reaches its perfect expression in concrete acts of *caritas*, of love, of a love that, as Lesley-Anne said, reaches across the nations. Her witness raises important questions for us. Am I conscious of living as a member of a world-wide communion, in which many of my brothers and sisters are suffering? How do my lifestyle choices impact them? How does the call to solidarity and charity challenge me to make changes to the way I live? To what acts of *caritas* am I called by the suffering of my neighbours here at home?

When Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa of Calcutta, he drew from her life the important lesson that evangelization passes through charity. The Church, as catholic, is missionary, called to bring to all people the knowledge of the truth of God's saving will in Christ, called to evangelize. No more effective manner of evangelization exists than acts of love. *Caritas Internationalis* is the Church's universal outreach of love. It reminds us of the call to charity that obligates all of us as members of the Body of Christ. May we neither fail to support its good work nor ignore the challenge it presents to each of us to find ways in our own circumstances to reflect the love of Christ that reaches out to all nations.