

“SOMETHING LARGER THAN OURSELVES” ECCLESIOLOGY 101 AND THE CSA

The mid-1980's was an interesting time in the Church, following relatively closely after the close of Vatican II. Bold and effective new initiatives (SPO and NET to name two local examples) were emerging, while a few parishes were still; experimenting in unauthorized ways with the liturgy. On a free weekend a seminary classmate and I decided to visit one such parish. We stopped to see the priest after Mass, and in a cordial, though awkward exchange, we inquired as to why we did not recognize anything in the Eucharistic Prayer, save the words of consecration. The response was striking as he explained that he believed the Eucharistic Prayer needed to emerge from the local community and was the prayer of the presider. My classmate jumped on that one in a heartbeat, beating me to the punch. “But the Eucharistic Prayer,” he said, “is the prayer of the Church.” This prayer, read from a binder (not a Roman Missal) contained neither mention of the pope, nor of the local bishop. Our challenge to him was simple— “But Father, every parish here belongs to the Archdiocese, which links us, not only with Pope John Paul II but also Archbishop Roach...that is what unites all of us as Catholics.”

More than 30 years later, I shake my head and yet am glad we engaged him honestly. He was cordial, but clearly flustered. He even nervously joked about “not needing to tell others,” only reinforcing the unauthorized nature of the prayer. He wasn't thrilled with seminarians “crashing” his Mass. Basic Ecclesiology 101 teaches that **no Catholic parish stands alone**. For better or worse, in good times and bad, for richer or poorer, we are linked to a much wider Church than ourselves, and thank the Lord for that! It is a fundamental tenet of Catholic theology that links us together. We are not Congregationalists, (*Seinfeld* alert— “Not that there's anything wrong with that!”) autonomously running our own affairs. God bless them— Harvard and Yale were founded to train Congregational clergy. But being Catholic means in its very core something unique. It's tougher to exist as part of a much larger group, and this presents its own challenges. But we sincerely believe that Christ founded one Church, and that we are tasked with preserving her unity. It is not an invitation; it is a command in the priestly prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint John, Chapter 17— “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you.”

We Catholics belong both to a universal and a particular Church, the latter term being a technical term for a diocese. Our “particular” Church is that of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Vatican II teaches that the one Church of Christ comes into being both in and from the particular churches: “The individual bishops, however, are the **visible principle and foundation of unity** in their **particular churches**, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches, comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity. (see *Lumen Gentium*, # 23, emphasis added). This theology traces itself back in large part to **St. Cyprian of Carthage** who wrote that “whereas there is one Church from Christ throughout the whole world, divided into many members, and one episcopate, diffused throughout a harmonious multitude of many bishops...” (*Epistle LV, para. 20*)

From **St. Luke's in Clearwater** in the northwest corner of the Archdiocese to **St. Michael's in Pine Island** (southeast corner) is 124 miles, while from **Immaculate Conception in Marysburg** (southwest corner) to **Sacred heart in Rush City** (farthest north) is about 130 miles. You can drive pretty much anywhere in this Archdiocese in two hours. Our parishes are urban, suburban, exurban and rural. It is also evident that the very concept of a particular church such as a diocese presupposes a universal Church to which that diocese belongs. “The Church of Saint Paul and Minneapolis” means little absent its relation to the Church beyond its 12-county area.

I am enlisting your support for the **Catholic Services Appeal** precisely because I embrace this ecclesiology that we are part of a larger church than our parish. For St. Cyprian, unity was paramount and became his life-long search and passion. Just as it wasn't easy in the 3rd century when the Church had to face heresies, schisms, and persecutions that threatened the visible unity of the Christian community, neither is it in our day. Supporting the CSA does not mean that we agree with absolutely everything that has transpired within this local Church. But it does mean that we make an intentional choice to foster this unity and support these **18 vital ministries that directly receive help** through the CSA. Today's bulletin insert lists them. We feel the

connection with the larger church uniquely here at the Cathedral, privileged as we are to host nearly 30 Archdiocesan-wide liturgies here each year.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, one of the Apostolic Fathers, wrote beautifully of the relationship that exists between priests and their bishop. May it be a fruitful passage for our own prayer and reflection as we strive to build up the Body of Christ here in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. “It is fitting that you should concur with the will of your Bishop, which you also do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the Bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore, in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And man by man, you become a choir, that being harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison you may with one voice sing to the Father...” (*Saint Ignatius, of Antioch - Letter to the Ephesians*, 4: 1-2).

- Kudos to the Star Tribune for listing the names of all 10,000 Super Bowl volunteers in its Monday edition. While you needed a magnifying glass to read it, all the names were there. Nor can we forget the 6,000 Minnesota law enforcement and National Guard members who assisted. I heard from several attendees at the game that the volunteers were amazing, so friendly, helpful and hospitable.
- Separation of Church and State? Minneapolis public school 3rd to 5th graders are receiving lessons in “Yoga Calm,” courtesy of an outside firm and funded through an innovation grant from the district. Ostensibly, it is to help them manage stress. Oh, and the floor mats look really colorful! Hmmn, I wonder if they will allow equal time for meditative prayer?
- The Archdiocese recently lost a wonderful priest, **Fr. Mark Dosh**. Once a seminary prof and later pastor and Venezuelan missionary, he remained active in his retirement. As a young priest, I assisted him on weekends for two years in White Bear Lake. If I had the Saturday evening Mass, he invited me to stay for dinner. I felt like I should have submitted those conversations as continuing education credits, so wise, so incredibly well-read and knowledgeable he was. But more than anything, he was kind and holy. *Requiescat in pace*.
- Ready or not, here comes Lent. Desiring a fruitful season for all, I encourage you to finalize plans to participate in Ash Wednesday and the other opportunities that this holy season provides.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector