

The Apostles' Creed: Week 12

...I believe in the holy universal Church...

In the Scriptures:

1. This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:
In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.
Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

(Isaiah 2:1-4)

2. If your brother sins*, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

(Matthew 18:15-20)

* *some manuscripts say: "sins against you".*

3. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

(1 Corinthians 12: 12-20, 27)

As described by Christian writers:

4. The preaching of the church is everywhere consistent and continues on an even course. It receives testimony from the prophets, the apostles, and all the disciples ... through the beginning, the middle, the end, and through the entire dispensation of God. That well-grounded system which tends to man's salvation, namely, our faith, which we have received from the church, we preserve. It is always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel causing even the vessel that contains it to renew its youth as well. For this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose: that all the members receiving it may be brought to life. The fellowship with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God.

- Irenaeus, “Against Heresies”

5. Is this not what makes us one? We come from different countries, cultures and churches. We have different temperaments, gifts and interests. And yet we have this in common: the same God as our Heavenly Father; the same Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord; and the same Holy Spirit as our indwelling Comforter.

It is our common participation (our *koinonia*) in God (Father, Son and Spirit) which unites us. And this is most vividly expressed in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist.

- John Stott, “The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor”

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6. Any view of Christianity which does not make community its very essence is foreign to the whole spirit of the New Testament. All of the great New Testament images of the Christian life are profoundly communal. Christians are “members of the household of God,” “fellow citizens with the saints,” living stones built into a holy temple for a dwelling place for God, the Holy Spirit, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,” members of the very Body of Christ. No more exalted vision of the strength and power of human community has ever been had than that which emerged from the Church in these first writings which She produced. A conversion to Christianity which does not involve at the same time full incorporation into this community with a consequent full sharing in the common life in the Body of Christ is impoverished and impotent.

-William Grosvenor Pollard, “Physicist and Christian: a Dialogue Between the Communities”

Why we believe in one holy and universal Church:

- Christ chose twelve apostles and promised them the authority to baptize, preach the gospel, and make binding decisions. From this it is clear that he intended to institute an organized and ongoing community, the Church, after his departure, and not merely leave behind a collection of isolated individuals. Since there is only one God, one Christ, and one Holy Spirit, all real Christians (regardless of their denomination or nationality) must regard themselves as belonging to the *same* universal Church. And since God is holy, those who are part of this Body of Christ are also called to be holy (set aside for God's purposes), despite our weaknesses and shortcomings.
- From a practical perspective, each Christian has only a few of the many abilities and gifts provided by the Spirit. For this reason, we need to work together in order to represent Christ to the world. While each of us has the right to individually go to our Father in prayer at any time, God reveals himself most clearly when two or more Christians are worshipping him together, and seeing his glory reflected in the love which we ought to have for one another.