

THE CHURCH IS UNIVERSAL



Jesus said, “The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of all shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Mt. 13:31-32). This parable is applicable to the Church.

The Church is Present Everywhere

On the day of Pentecost, when the Church was formed, there were people who spoke different languages and belonged to different nations like the Parthians and the Medes, ... listening to the preaching of the apostles. (Act. 2:5-11). So, at the very start of the Church, we can say, the Church reflected catholicity or universality. The catholicity of the Church means that the Church is present everywhere in the world and she becomes the way of salvation for all peoples of the world. 'Catholicity' or 'Universality' was the term used from the beginning to indicate this particular character

of the Church. The English word, 'Catholic' was formed from the Greek word 'Katholikos'. This term means, 'open to all' or 'embracing all'. We apply this term 'Catholic' to the Church in the sense that the church 'embraces all.'

The Church Embraces all the People of the World

Keeping the whole of humanity in mind, God called Abraham the Father of nations. Through the call of Abraham, God formed the people of Israel. But the purpose of this call and choice was the salvation of the entire humanity. **Jesus was born as the Good News for all peoples and as the Saviour of the entire world.** Jesus through his life and words, gave the message of salvation for all. He commissioned the apostles to go to the whole world and proclaim the Good News. Through them the Church, the visible sign of the kingdom of God, was established and its universality confirmed.

The Church Embraces all Cultures

The Church is to lead the whole world to salvation. She is bound to go into all cultures and receive all cultures and sanctify all cultures, irrespective of religion, race and caste. The universality of the Church is reflected in that fishing net that contained 153 large fish and yet was not torn. God wants that all people must know the truth and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). So the catholicity of the Church means that it contains all peoples.

St. John Damascene speaks of the universality of the Church: **"The Church is universal because she has gathered into one salvific faith and the knowledge of God, peoples who are diverse in tradition, language, culture and race."** St. Iraneus teaches that, the diversity in tradition confirms the unity in faith. According to St. Augustine, the diversity in tradition reflects the beauty of the Church.

Different Traditions and Universality

Pope John Paul II says, **"In the Church, there is the Oriental Tradition and also the Latin Tradition. The catholicity of the Church is not reflected in its totality through one tradition alone. All should taste and know the universality of the Church that is preserved and made to grow in the life of the oriental and western Churches, a legacy that is divine and indivisible"** (Kizhakkinte Velicham, No.1). Thus we see that the

universality of the Church is reflected clearly when we preserve and live the oriental and western traditions of the Church.

The Universal Councils of the Church

The Universal Councils of the Church play an all important role in expressing the unity and universality of the Church. Twenty one Universal Councils have taken place in the Church till now. Over and above we can speak of a council that took place during the time of the apostles themselves, which was held in Jerusalem to discuss the question of exempting the gentile Christians from the Jewish practice of circumcision. God revealed through Peter, the head of the apostles, and Paul , the zealous apostle of Christ, that circumcision was not needed. **The councils are held in the Church to interpret the mysteries of faith to the peoples, to bring about renewal in the Church, and to find solutions to the various problems faced by the Church.**

The Church is the sign of salvation for all peoples. God wills that all should come into the Church through the proclamation of the gospel and the witnessing by the members of the Church.

Word of God to Read and Meditate

Acts: 4:32 – 5:11

Word of God to Remember

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
(Lk. 24:47).

Let us Pray

Jesus Christ, God of all peoples and Lord of all things created, illuminate the entire world by the light of your gospel.

My Resolution

Like the apostles who preached the gospel everywhere, I shall pass on the gospel message to all according to my state of life.

To Think with the Church

The one People of God is accordingly present in all the nations of the earth, since its citizens, who are taken from all nations, are of a kingdom whose nature is not earthly but heavenly. All the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit so that 'he who dwells in Rome knows those in most distant parts to be his members'

(Vat II, The Church No. 13)

To Know the Mother Church

Ernakulam was made an Archdiocese and Trichur, Changanacherry and Kottayam as suffrogon dioceses by Pope Pius XI on 21st December 1923. The diocese of Tellicherry was formed in 1953 for the emigrant Syro-Malabar Christians. The boundaries of the diocese of Changanacherry were expanded towards the South till Kanyakumari, spreading through the dioceses of Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam. The diocese of Trichur was extended crossing over to the areas under the diocese of Coimbatore. The diocese of Tellicherry was extended across the borders of the dioceses of Mysore and Mangalapuram. In the same year the diocese of Kottayam was expanded making it touch the borders of the entire Syro-Malabar Church. Changanacherry was raised to the status of an Archdiocese in 1956.

Questions

1. What is meant by the Universality or Catholicity of the Church?
2. The Church includes all peoples and cultures: explain.
3. What is the teaching of St. John Damascene on the universality of the Church?
4. When is the Catholicity of the Church expressed?
5. What is the purpose of the universal council of the Church?