

Wholeness

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Who does not dream of being whole, of being innocent? And who does not suffer crises, contradictions, traumas, being affected by the breakdowns that come from personal and collective evil and sin? Yet, we are made for something else!

I will never forget the Mass for clergy which was celebrated in the Jubilee year 2,000. I was in the crowd in the middle of St Peter's Square and, with all the people coming and going, it was hard to concentrate. Then suddenly, while Communion was being distributed and Pope John Paul was recollected in prayer, an inexplicable silence descended over the whole square. The experience was repeated a few weeks later at the World Youth Day 2000 with two million young people. During the Eucharistic adoration at the end of the Vigil, there was the same silence and recollection around us even though many of us were hundreds of meters from the stage. These experiences made me think: holiness is passed on to others, shared with them, lived for them, with them.

Holiness, in its original biblical sense, meant separation, being set apart in order to belong to God. But when God in Christ became human and, during the abandonment on the cross, he took upon himself the legacy of sin and division. In that moment the wall of separation between God and humanity was cast down and our freedom was restored. Holiness then recalls us to that original harmony which was part of God's plan: harmony between us and God, between us and others, between us and creation.

Striving for holiness is therefore striving for wholeness but is certainly not a wholeness acquired by our own efforts but something which we receive as a gift; something to be shared and welcomed; the fruit of grace planted in the soil of our lives and permitted to grow. If we understand holiness in this way, then it is something which is shared beyond the barriers of differing confessions of faith.

It is not a wholeness which is turned in on itself, filled with a sense of self-sufficient completeness, but one which is totally open. It is one which is open to God, first of all, to the gift of the Spirit, to the lifeblood that reaches us from the tree of the cross and the vine that is Christ and which makes us "children". It is a wholeness which is open also to others, to our brothers and sisters in faith, to everyone.

To aim for holiness, therefore, means setting our ego aside to make room for God and others, to become "Catholic" in the original sense of the Greek term *kat'olos* and 'ecumenical': open to the *oikoumene*, to the whole, the universal, to all.

It is striking that we can often find this sense of openness and welcome in people who touch us with their simplicity and humility. One example of this was the great Ecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras (+1972) who said of himself, "You must develop the ability to

disarm yourself. I have waged that war. It was terrible. But now, I am disarmed. [...] I am no longer wary, jealously clinging to my riches. I embrace and I share”.

On closer inspection, we see that in the New Testament holiness is understood in a collective sense, as an ecclesial phenomenon. In his letters, Paul addresses the “beloved of God called as saints in Rome, the “sanctified in Christ Jesus” in Corinth, the “saints in the whole of Achaia; he invites his readers to give financial support to the “saints who are in Jerusalem”. These are saints by grace and saints together, communally.

Origen and other Fathers of the early Christian centuries spoke of the *Ecclesial Soul* as the full realization of the Christian existence. We are called to live with this breadth, with this wholeness. It is how this kind of holiness can be lived out in a concrete way in ordinary life that is the focus of this issue of *Ekklesia*, how it is an indispensable prerequisite and foundation for a truly synodal Church.