

## **Incarnate Word Tract Series #5 Are You a Catholic?**

Yes, you are, if you are a Christian. But how often do you think of yourself as a Catholic? There are still people, even in our own Lutheran Church, who refer the word “Catholic” only to the Church of Rome. Yet, if you stop to realize that the word “Catholic” means “Universal,” and that it refers not only to the part of the Church under the Pope but to the whole Church on earth, then you, too, are a Catholic. Some people think that the word is unimportant and should be dropped from the vocabulary of the Church. But the term Catholic has a great deal of meaning which is too often ignored or forgotten when the term is not used.

### **The Whole Church**

If you think of yourself as a Catholic, then you will realize that you belong to the whole Church of Christ on earth—not to a mere sect within the Church. Throughout history the word “Catholic” has referred to the One Church of Christ which covers every corner of the globe, wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered. Thus you will not pompously exclude other Christians from “your Church.”

### **Catholic Doctrine**

If you think of yourself as a Catholic, you will better appreciate the teachings of the Church. Catholic doctrine is that doctrine which has been taught in the Church from the days of her very founding. The Lutheran Confessions repeatedly insist that in our doctrine “there is nothing that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church” and that “we have taken most diligent care that no new doctrine should creep into our churches,” because a new doctrine would be neither a scriptural nor a universal Catholic doctrine.

### **Catholic Baptism**

If you think of yourself as a Catholic, you will remember that there is *one* Baptism. You were not baptized into the Lutheran Church or the Presbyterian Church or the Episcopal Church, but you were baptized into the whole universal, Catholic Church of Christ. Every one who has received this Sacrament was baptized into the same Catholic Church.

### **Catholic Lord’s Supper**

If you think of yourself as a Catholic, you will have a much better appreciation for the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. You will remember the saints and martyrs of old who received this holy Sacrament, not monthly or less but rather weekly and even daily. And you will be sure to appreciate the truly Catholic teaching that the consecrated bread and wine are the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Catholic History**

If you think of yourself as a Catholic, you will remember that you belong to the same Church and the same Family of God as the great saints and martyrs of the ancient Church. You belong to the same Church as did St. Clement of Rome in the first century, St. Polycarp of Smyrna in the second century, the European St. Cyprian of the third century, the African St. Augustine of the fourth century, and the whole army of those great people of God who dedicated their lives to preserving the Catholic Church. You do not belong to a Church that started in the sixteenth century, but to the Church begun by Christ on Pentecost, and which has continued for nearly two thousand years with unbroken tradition.

You belong to the Church which can never exclude from fellowship and congregational life anyone simply because he speaks with a different accent or has a lighter or darker skin coloring. Your Church has existed not only in the United States, Germany, and Scandinavia, but has been found also in Asia, Africa, South America, and indeed in all the world.

## **Are You a Catholic?**

Yes, you are a Catholic, and it is important for you to think of yourself as a Catholic. If you do not, you will soon narrow your vision of the Church to one particular denomination, to one very limited period of time, and to one locality. You will tend to forget the magnificent heritage and the world-wide scope that Christ has bestowed on his holy Church. If you think of yourself as a Catholic, you will be able to say the Athanasian Creed with sincerity, understanding and conviction. It begins: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith. . . ." By God's grace you belong to the Catholic Church—the Church of all times, of all peoples, of all places. Thank God for it!