

LEARN OF ME

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LUBAC, in his book *Catholicism*, has rightly pointed out that the term Catholic as applied to the Church since the second century is basically an intrinsic note. None the less it has a popular use in our day as denoting the Church's world-wide commission: 'Going, therefore, teach ye all nations' (Douai) or 'Making disciples of all nations' (Knox). So, if we are asked what religion we belong to we invariably reply—'the Catholic'. By this we mean we do not belong to a merely national church or religion, such as the Anglican, but to the Church Universal. Yet our first name, given to us at Antioch, in the days of the Apostles, was Christian, i.e. the followers of Christ. Hence, Christian is our fundamental name, and the Christian Church is Catholic because she is meant to reunite all men in Christ.

This article is written to suggest we should make more constant use of our original title, and this for a spiritual reason.

To be a follower of Christ is to 'put on Christ', as St Paul insists; that is, to make him the ideal we seek to imitate. Christ is the centre of our religion. To believe the right doctrines, to worship in the right way, is not enough; we are called to be 'other Christs'. 'Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart'; that is, 'Be like me in your gentleness and humility'. We do well to remember that the heart in Semitic usage was not the symbol of love, as it is with us. Heart stands for the total person and that person's characteristics. Hence, this oft-quoted text really means 'I am in myself meekness and humility'.

Now come to our self-examination forms. In them we relate sins to the laws we have broken or failed to make use of. So, ungentleness and pride are related to this or that commandment or virtue. We confess we have been proud; we have been ungentle. I would urge that our self-examination forms should relate our sins and omissions to the person of our Lord. Then we would confess: 'I have not followed the meekness of Christ.' 'I have not practised our Lord's humility.' Here sin is brought out as a personal matter between our Lord and myself rather than a

failure to practise this or that virtue. So also in regard to our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. We can easily think of the Blessed Sacrament as some kind of holy thing rather than our Lord veiled and hidden. The Spanish are happy in having the term: *Jesus Sacramento*. In those two words we have a perfect phrase for the real presence: *Jesus*, the inner gift; *Sacramento* the sign that gives yet conceals the inner gift. Is it not true that we can be deeply attached to our faith and Church and yet strangely wanting in personal love for our Lord? We need to remind ourselves of Gregory of Nyssa's great saying: 'He who beholds the Church really beholds Christ.' Had that saying become one of our slogans we might never have heard the charge brought against the whole idea of a Church, that it is a wall of separation between God and the soul. The Church should never be thought of as apart from her supreme Head but as manifesting him as the total Christ. This Christ-centering would help us to realise that we are not called merely to practise virtues in general, but the specific virtues of Christ. I have referred already to the eucharist, and I would relate my thesis to our Lord's own teaching in John vi. 'He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, lives continually in me, and I in him.' Here holy communion is spoken of as the union of two persons: the Christ-person and the self-person, and this, as St Paul's words suggest, is to result in the elimination of the self-person and the supremacy of the Christ-person: 'Yet I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me' (Knox). In pastoral work I have found this relating of ourselves to our Lord the most effective appeal. Thus, in dealing with bad temper, I say: 'Have you faced the fact that to be a Christian means to become like our Lord? He said: Learn of me, for I am meek.' Then I go on to say: 'When tempted to be angry or aggressive, at once think of our Lord in your soul. One look at him will steady you.' Usually I hear this: 'I never thought of that.' You see, temper was thought of as a breach of charity, but not as a dissonance with the indwelling Lord.

Hear again St Paul, in his letter to the Galatians: 'I am in travail over you afresh, until I can see Christ's image formed in you!' (Knox). Can any of us say that we are personally aware of this meaning of our call to the Church, or that it is our usual experience of our fellow Catholics? The real meaning of sin is that we have not been true to our privilege of being 'other Christs', but too

often we think of our failures as breaches of commandments or imperfection in this or that virtue.

In practice my thesis could work out in this way. A lonely priest, or a husband not too happily married, may meet a girl of charming character and taking ways. Gradually she enters more and more into the life of either—the priest, shall we say? Neither has had any improper intention—the friendship has simply grown. At length the priest realizes there is danger and he must act to save his priesthood. This he may do by reminding himself before God that he is a priest, and that he must be true to the great trust and honour conferred on him, and of the sorrow and scandal he would cause were he to come to disaster. Yet I suggest there could be a still more powerful and effective line to take: the bringing into the now dangerous friendship not of a mere consideration but of another personality, one more powerful than that of the woman; and that personality our Lord himself. Nothing is so mighty and wonderful as he. If we have made him real to ourselves so that we could not fail him, we will soon be safe. The choice between him and the girl is quickly made. We simply could not grieve him, and we love him too much to prefer anyone to him. His will is our law, his pleasure our delight.

Every trial and suffering can be overcome by this taking hold of our Lord. He is the centre of our life and the supreme master of our love. I would conclude with two texts: first, that touching request of the Greeks to St Philip: 'Sir, we would see Jesus', (John xii, 21), and the concluding words of St Mark's account of the Transfiguration: 'They saw no one . . . but Jesus only.'