**Scripture**

### Prayer for the Readers

**14For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every familyin heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

**Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Message**

  Study The most misunderstood part of the Apostle’s Creed is the phrase we are considering today. I have had people tell me that they do not repeat this part of the creed because they think that it means the Roman Catholic Church, and if they had wanted to be Catholics they would have joined that church.

But the word “catholic” means universal.

We believe in a holy church, and one which is universal, that is to say, one which is world-wide in its reach. It is the church for every race, nation, and culture. There is no one who cannot belong to it. It is not for some small select group of people, it is for everyone. It is not just for just a privileged few in a particular corner of the globe or era of history. It is for all people, in all places, of all time.

It is for the educated and the unlearned. It is for the rich person and the beggar. It is for the ancients and the moderns, the young and the old. It is for the American, the African, the Asian, the Russian, the Israeli and the Iranian alike.

The Church of Christ encompasses and embraces every part of the human family.

You can belong to it today. But it is bigger than the United Methodist Church. It is bigger than the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and all of the other denominations put together.

We are a part of the redeemed of the ages. God has touched our lives in the same way no matter whether we live in the city or the country; whether we are black or white, young or old, Spanish or Asian, from Babylon or Brooklyn.

We have a common experience of forgiveness and regeneration. We have a common heritage and a common destiny, and someday we will exist together as a common community of the blessed in the eternal kingdom of God here on earth.

It is a Kingdom that destroys all distinctions and creates a family out of all the beautiful mixture and background of the people of God.

There will be those there who will have been forgiven much, and those whose sins were not as great, but all of whom realized their need of a Savior.

The only ones not found there will be the proud and the unrepentant — those who did not recognize the lordship of Christ, and who would rather follow their own ideas and desires than to follow God.

Missing will be those who found it too much trouble to bother with God and obey him. Outside will be those who neither served God nor loved him.

The only qualification for entering the Kingdom is the willingness to submit your life to him.

Other than that, the family of God includes any person from any time and from any place in the world. It is the catholic church — the universal church.

In the true church no one is asked to leave. The reason this phrase was included in the Apostle’s Creed is that in the beginning the Jews thought they were the only people who could belong to God — that only Jews could be Christians. Since Jesus was a Jew and worked primarily among his own people, the first Christians were all Jews and naturally saw Jesus as the Jewish Messiah — the fulfillment of the faith God had given them down through the years as a nation. It was a completely new idea to them to realize that Jesus died for all mankind, that he was the Messiah of the world, not just the Jews.

The reason we still repeat this part of the creed is that from time to time there are still people and churches who think they are the only ones who are right and are going to make it.

They have a corner on God and everyone else is doomed.

God allows us to have certain differences and ways of doing things, because we are different people. That is why there are different denominations and churches, but in all of them there are sincere, repentant, faithful followers of Jesus Christ who are joined to a universal, eternal family which is the true Church — the people of God.

We all reach different people with our different styles of worship and different emphases. Some of you would feel very uncomfortable in a Roman Catholic church, or a Pentecostal Church, and some of their people would feel very uncomfortable here.

We are different personalities, and there is nothing wrong with that. It reminds us that there are others who can be different and yet be genuine followers of Christ as well. We don’t have to all be shaped with the same Christian cookie cutter. We can do things differently and still love each other deeply, realizing we are a part of the same family. We don’t have to be one organization to be one in spirit.

But this true Church, of which we are speaking, is not only catholic, or universal, it is most importantly holy.

It is holy because it is made up of people made holy by the cleansing forgiveness of God and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is an important part of the church because without holiness it ceases to be the true Church.

Scripture says, “...**Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25)**.

The Apostle Peter wrote: **“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:13)**.

One of the names in the New Testament for the church is the “Body of Christ.” We are his body. The only way my spirit can express itself is through my body. Without my body my spirit would not be able to express its feelings, or thoughts.

In much the same way, the Spirit of Christ has no body here on earth except us who are to be his body and means of expression to the world. If the church of Jesus Christ is his body then the way the church expresses itself must be holy; its actions must be pure.

When you realize that you are an expression of the Spirit of Christ in this world then you cannot do just anything that you want any longer.

**“Therefore honor God with your body**” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

**Your life is** the only expression and evidence of Jesus Christ that some people will ever see. It will be your life and your expression of his Spirit that determine whether they too want his Spirit, or want nothing to do with it.

The Spirit will be in our church only as much as the Spririt is in us, the individual members. We are the true church only as much as individually we are a part of the real, universal Church of Jesus Christ — that body of people who are the people of God.

This is why scripture says, **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching”** (Hebrews 10:25).

Pointing to the faults of the church as a reason for a person’s absence is no excuse.

They will never find a perfect church any more than they will find a perfect person, because the church is people.

Now, when a person joins the church, the confirmation ritual which we read says, **“The church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time, for the conduct of worship and the due administration of his Word and Sacraments, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world. All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies.”**

I believe in the holy catholic church... and I love it.

Imperfect as it is, I believe it is God’s instrument in this world to bring his people together into a life of faith that leads to life eternal.

And I want to be a part of it, because I want to be a part of you, and I want to be a part of God’s plan in his world. Amen….