

It is wonderful to be back here, 33 years after I left this college. I am so grateful for all that it gave me and one of the things it gave me was my tutor, Anthony Philips, who is here tonight. I owe Anthony a great deal. I remember at Principal's Collections he would always say that I was lazy. I wasn't lazy. I always worked really hard. But I took his words to heart and worked even harder. Anthony made me a workaholic. Thanks, Anthony. When I left Jesus I went to St Hugh's as I was awarded a graduate scholarship there to do my DPhil on Roman Catholic reactions to the Oxford Movement, the nineteenth-century movement which sought to emphasise the Church of England's roots, not in the Reformation, but in the teachings of early Christianity and to claim it as primarily a Catholic, rather than a Protestant Church. This riled many more Protestantly-minded Anglicans and excited some Roman Catholics and bewildered many more. It led to much debate about the nature of catholicity and the extent to which catholicity was rooted in ancient beliefs or in a particular institution, namely the papacy. This was important because all sides agreed that catholicity is what makes a Church authentic or true. Every time we say the creed we affirm belief in the holy catholic Church. But what are we proclaiming in those words? The word 'catholic' is often translated as 'universal' but that does not quite capture it, 'whole' or 'of the whole' would be a more accurate rendering. In ancient Greek *katholikos* apparently meant something like 'accord with the cosmic order'.¹

I want to suggest catholicity should be understood as accord with the divine life. The divine life dances to a very distinctive rhythm which is represented by the cross. It is first of all expansive, encompassing the whole. There are no edges to the divine, no place, no time, where it is not. There are no limits to its breadth, depth or height. God in Christ even enters into the space of his absence, death, transforming it into presence. The Psalmist puts it thus: 'Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast'. Yet, even as the divine heart beats to the rhythm of expansion, it focuses itself. On the cross is Christ in whom the fullness of the divine dwells. This is not a contraction of the divine but a concentration. This rhythm of expansion and concentration is evident in the life of Christ, who is the Word of God concentrated in the life of a human being who ascends to his Father and yet focuses himself in the sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist where we eat his flesh and drink his blood, and we in turn become his whole, cosmic body. In being called to be catholic, the Church, the followers of Christ, are called to dance to that rhythm of expansion and focus that is revealed in Christ. This means that the Church if it is to be true, that is, if it is to authentically participate in and mediate the divine life, must exist in a matrix of complex relationships with the past and the future, the earth and the heavens, the body and the soul, the immediate and the thickness of life, myriad of human cultures and every being on the planet.

I think the closest I have come to experiencing catholicity was in 2013 when I walked the last section of the Camino, the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. If you don't know about the Camino watch the film, *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen. I guarantee you will want to do the pilgrimage once you have watched it. When you walk the Camino you cannot help but be conscious of the fact that you are walking in the footsteps of millions of people, those who have walked it before you and those who will walk it after you. When

you walk the Camino you are doing so with people from all over the world, all ages, all genders, people doing it for religious reasons, people doing it for fun, people doing it to reflect, to heal, to get away, and memorials along the walk remind you that some people die doing it. The spirit of comradeship on the Camino is extraordinary, transcending language barriers, a huge diversity of people helping each other on to their focused destination. You do not want to see anyone give up. You walk through sun and rain and up mountains, across streams and at night the Milky Way illuminates the route. It is a journey of the soul and body. It is an individual journey but it is also a communal one and a cosmic one. The Camino connects you with the whole even as you focus on your specific destination, which in turn is a symbol of the journey into God.

One theory about the creeds is that they provide the grammatical rules for Christianity. They do not dictate what we can say but they do determine what we cannot say. If we affirm that the Church is catholic we cannot say that there is anyone or anything beyond its interest, we cannot erect clear boundaries around it. The sins against catholicity are contraction, sectarianism, exclusion, dualism and individualism, shallowness and disconnection. I do not need to tell you that Christians individually and that Churches commit all these sins, I commit these sins and when we do we do not ring true, we present ourselves to others as inauthentic. Catholicity is something we grow into as we grow into God, we are not there yet, no one ecclesial body possesses it perfectly and this is made clear by the fact that we say we believe in the *holy* catholic Church. Holiness tells us what sort of relationship the breadth, depth and height of catholicity requires. Holiness is also something that belongs first and foremost to God. Christians are called to be holy by being swept up into the nature of the divine which is to empty and outpour itself in love. Expansion and focus breathes the life of the divine into the world and nature of that life is sacrificial. A Church is holy if it manifests and imitates that self-emptying for the sake of others.

To profess belief in a holy catholic Church is not to profess a belief in an institution which already exists, but a belief that it is possible by virtue of God's self-outpouring in love for the followers of Christ individually and corporately to share in the divine life. You and I are called to make the Church catholic, to make it an authentic, by responding to God's catholicity and holiness by opening our hearts to God and by living our lives according to the rhythm of divine, a rhythm of expansion and focus, selflessness and sacrifice for the sake of the other. We are called to live such lives for the past (this is why Christians worry so much about their relationship to the tradition. The writers of Deuteronomy implore the ancient Israelites to remember that no matter what the future holds they were once slaves and stateless people. We have to stay in relationship with the past). We are also called to live such lives for the future, for our human neighbours and our animal neighbours, for the earth (what kind of sacrificial living does climate change demand of us?), for humanity and the person next to us, to their soul, their body. When we profess belief in a holy catholic Church we are professing a belief in what we, you and I, can become together by grace, partakers in and manifestations of the divine life.

ⁱ Ilia Delio OSF, *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology and Consciousness* (Maryknoll, NT: Orbis Books, 2015).