

**June 2, 2019**

**Catholic Church**  
**Ephesians 3:14-19**

3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,  
3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,  
3:16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be  
strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,  
3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you,  
being rooted and grounded in love,  
3:18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the  
breadth and length and height and depth,  
3:19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that  
you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**1. The World-wide Church**

The church has four qualities. It is to be “one”, to be “holy”, to be “catholic”, and to be “apostolic.” Today, let’s learn together about the “catholic church.”

In the English translation of the Apostles’ Creed, the church is called the “catholic church.” In this case, the word “catholic” does not mean “the Roman Catholic Church.” The word “catholic” is “katholikos” (καθολικός) in Greek. Though this word does not appear in the Bible, but the word for it is in Acts 9:31. “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” The word “throughout all” is Greek for “kath ols” (καθ ολς), and its pronunciation and meaning are similar to those of “katholikos” (καθολικός).

The church began in Jerusalem. The first members were Jewish people. However, the church was not only for one region or one nation. As the Lord Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,” (Acts 1:8) the church that began in Jerusalem has spread to the end of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit. The “Acts of the Apostles” written by Luke can be divided into three words: “Jerusalem,” “Jewish and Samaria,” and “The End of the Earth.” Chapters 1 to 7 are the “Part of Jerusalem.” It states that the church has begun in Jerusalem. From Chapter 8 is the “Part of Judea and Samaria.” According to Acts 8:1, “And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles,” the church has spread in the Judea-Samaria regions. And from Chapter 13 is “Part of the End of the Earth.” The story of Paul’s missionary travels is written, and it is written that the church has spread to “the end of the earth.”

The Lord commanded the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), and the disciples did it. “And they went out and preached everywhere.” (Mark 16:20) By making the church the “catholic church” we affirm on our mission to spread throughout the world.

If the early church thought, “We have a church in this town. It’s enough for us to keep it in the town,” the gospel would not reach Japan in the Far East. In the early church, when a church was born in a large town, people went out for preaching from there to smaller

towns and villages, and the church was built there, too. The church spread over the whole land as the temples and creeping plants crawled on the ground and filled the ground.

When I became a Christian, in my mother church was doing “Rural Evangelism” after worship service. The members went to small towns and villages around and evangelized. The ministries mission churches were born from that, and they became churches. Also, in the church where my seminary senior was pastor, there were four home meetings in the east, west, north, south, and west of the town, which each became a church. After I became a pastor, I visited the pastor and was very inspired by him. So, when I was working in Japan, the number of churches increased. Then we decided to open a new mission church sending about 20 people there.

At that time, it was very painful to leave the people who went to the mission. Everyone would have wanted to gether in one church together. However, we were guided to the conclusion to open a mission church to convey the gospel to more people. At that time, we were able to mutually confirm that the church is the “catholic church” that should be spread throughout the earth.

## **2. The Universal Church**

“The catholic church” is translated also as the “universal church.” In the Bible, the word “church” is used in two ways. One is the local church, which is an individual church in each area. The other is the universal church that includes all local churches. In English, the words “church” or “churches” are used in 106 verses of the New Testament; of which 72 are singular “church” and 34 are plural “churches.”

“Churches” refers to the local church. In the singular case, the universal church, which is one body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to “the church of Rome,” “the church of Corinth,” “the church of Galatia,” “the church of Ephesus,” “the church of the Philippi,” “the church of Colosse,” “the church of Thessalonica”. But, to be precise, it means “the church in Rome”, “the church in Corinth”, “the church in Galatia”, “the church in Ephesus”, “the church in Philippi”, “the church in Colosse” “The church in Thessalonica”. Rather than having separate churches in different places, one universal church appears in each area in the form of a regional church. The apostles taught so, believers believed in the universal church, that is, the catholic church.

The Bible calls this universal church “the family of God.” It is a large family united to one Father God. According to Ephesians 2:19, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” “The family of God” here does not mean that members of individual churches are as close as family. It refers to the unity and union of the individual churches and churches that belong to the catholic church. You should not think that every church is made up of yourself. It serves as “the body of Christ,” supports each other as “the family of God,” and is a part of a catholic church that is built together as the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” and shows the glory of God.

However, I think it is not something that can be done immediately, even if you are suddenly told that you are conscious of the catholic church. As it is said, “Think globally, act locally,” I think it would be good if each church starts by cherishing the denominations,

conventions, association, and so on. Denominations, and groups of churches are a form of a catholic church. It is not specific if it is suddenly called “all churches in the whole world.” First, let us try to feel that the church is a big “family of God” by deepening the fellowship of the churches with the same roots or sharing the same vision.

Many churches keep The first Sunday of October as the “World Communion Sunday.” This was originally started by the United States Presbyterian Church in order to be aware of the relationship with the same denominational church abroad, but eventually spread to all denominations. By keeping this day, we can be aware of the catholic church. Regardless of the denomination, having churches in the same area come together and work together to evangelize and serve the needs of the area is a good opportunity to show that the church of Christ is one. Each church and member should also receive great blessings.

### **3. The Public Church**

In the Bible, believers are called “brothers,” and there is also the word “family of faith” (Galatians 6:10). The word, “family,” means the unity of Christians in the same faith in Christ, but it does not mean that the church is “family-like,” like an extension of the general family. The Bible says the church is “public.”

As you know, “church” is called “ekklesia” in Greek. And it is a word that represents the parliament of the Greek city state. When the parliament was convened, the chosen people gathered in the hall and debated, then the law was voted, and the city state was ruled thereby.

Just as the city-state of ekklesia is public, the ekklesia of the Kingdom of God, the church, is also public. Here, according to the teachings of the King Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, things must be determined prayerfully, and what has been determined must be faithfully executed. The personal preferences of one or two persons should not be overshadowed. To that end, it is important for the church to make rules and organizations and to do things in order.

Everyone likes a family-like and warm church. However, if “family-like” encourages unhealthy dependency and selfishness, or human intimacy gets away from other people, it will no longer be a “public (catholic) church”.

The church I used to attend in my student years was an evening service every Sunday, so we all had lunch and dinner with the pastor’s family. There were many people of the same age, and it was rare in Japan at that time, and they called each other by their first names. It was a “family-like” friendly church. However, even when new people came, they were talking with one another and it was unwise to speak to them. It was gradually improved, but at that time I was taught that the church should not forget that it is public, no matter how familiar it may be.

After that, I went to another church. Every Sunday, we put a carpet on the tatami mats of the pastor’s residence, which was only two rooms, and put the folding chairs and have worship service there. It was a “home church.” But the pastor said, “Don’t run the church in the family-like way because it’s small. You have to set elders and deacons in accordance with the rules so that you can run church well as the church grows.” He always taught and guided the members.

Over time, the number of people increased and grew up as an independent church. From this I was able to learn many things about what the church should be, especially what is needed to keep the church public.

Everybody wants to find a comfortable church there. But if you are seeking only that, neither you nor the church can grow. Everyone flows in the lower direction, or each asserts what they want to do, and the misery that the true fellowship in the Lord is broken. If that happens, as described in 3 John 1:9, it happens that Diotrephes liked to put himself first in the church, and the true “head” Christ will be kicked out of the church. It is possible for the church to become a sect or cult only for a certain people, and the human congregation with a flavor of Christianity.

Ephesians 3:17-19 says, “You, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength 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.” The church is a place to experience the love of Christ there and testify that love to people. And “the breadth and length and height and depth” of Christ’s love is known “with all the saints.” It is possible to know and let the people known in “the catholic church.” If we do not keep the church as a “catholic church,” we can not fulfill our mission of witnessing the love of Christ. Remembering that you are a part of the church and the church is a part of the “catholic church.” Let us encourage church life each other in such way.

## **(Prayer)**

The Father God of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have created the church in order that you nurture those who believed in Jesus Christ and be saved, and make them to proclaim the gospel and to witness Christ in the world. Make us aware that we are part of the “catholic church” as the church can fulfill its purpose and mission. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, Amen.