

THE CATHOLICITY OF OUR CATHOLIC CHURCH

While driving to Montgomery this past Monday I listened to CD copies of talks given at a conference for catechists and religious education leaders in Houston this past April. One of the keynote speakers was John Allen, a long-time columnist and reporter on things Vatican for *National Catholic Reporter*, and one of the most highly-regarded newspeople around.

His talk centered on dimensions of a recent book he published, which discusses what he calls “mega-trends” that will affect the Catholic Church in the 21st century. One of those is the radical shift in the world’s Catholic population from the northern to the southern hemisphere—meaning Latin America, Africa & Asia. While in some parts of Asia Catholicism (and Christianity in general) may still be a tiny minority, yet across the board the Faith is growing there by leaps and bounds. In Africa, in the last century, the number of Catholics grew from 1 million to over 100 million—and in places like Nigeria there is a crisis of vocations: there aren’t enough large seminaries to hold all the aspirants to Holy Orders!

Another of the “mega-trends” has to do with the globalization of the Church right here in America. There is an internationality now, and it can be seen in one of two ways. Some might perceive this as a foreign threat (Americans historically have viewed immigrants in this way, and very often in the 19th and early 20th centuries were anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant in one fell swoop: the reactions were particularly against the Irish, Polish and Italian immigrants).

On the other hand, it can be seen as the bringing together of wonderful and unique gifts to make the Body of Christ that much more lovely and diverse and blessed. This is the true vision of the “catholicity” of the Church, and it is the vision we want to embrace.

In our own parish of Our Savior there is reason to celebrate this diversity, and not just on Pentecost when we hear readings proclaimed in multiple languages. We have the gifts of people from Europe (whether Poland, or Slovakia, or Germany, or France, or Spain, or Italy...). We are blessed by people from Latin America (from Mexico, or Colombia, or Argentina...). And we are blessed by folks from Asia (including Vietnam, Philippines, Japan, Lebanon...). You get the picture: it’s the song “We are the World.”

This, along with other “immigrants” like myself (from the North!), and people who are long-time, multi-generational Mobile residents, makes for a parish that has so much to offer, so many ways to celebrate, so many perspectives on ministry and service. So praise the Lord and pass the variations!