

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Part Two - How to Be Holy

When we recite the creed each Sunday and say, “I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” most of us don’t imagine that it has much to do with our everyday lives. Stop! Every aspect of our faith has a practical application. Faith works. Our beliefs are held for good reasons. If we practice them our life changes for the better. If we neglect them our life dwindles into chaos and emptiness. The creed teaches us not only what to think, but how to think.

The words “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” connect with foundational philosophies in our lives. In this series of articles for Lent we are exploring twelve different “ism’s” that lie at the foundation of our country’s secular worldview. These false philosophies are embedded deeply in our assumptions. They infect our world view whether we like it or not. It’s like our Catholic faith is polluted by anti-Catholic belief systems right at the source. These anti-Catholic belief systems are just “there.” They undergird the advertising we look at, the music we listen to, the movies we watch, the books we read and the education we receive.

In the first article I exposed three “ism’s” that work against unity: Syncretism, Individualism and Sentimentalism. The first of the next set of three is Scientism. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Bl. Pope John Paul defines scientism as, “the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences; and it relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy.”

The follower of scientism assumes that the only valid form of knowledge is that which is tested by the scientific method. Remember, to be against scientism is not to be against science. The problem is not science, but scientism--the belief that only scientifically verified knowledge is worthwhile. This philosophy is very widespread. Throughout our educational systems, the media and academia it is assumed that modern science and technology have “disproved” religion.

The three false “ism’s” are like three ugly sisters, and the second sister is Utilitarianism. This is the belief that if something does the job that is all that matters. Efficiency and economy is the bottom line. It is a good thing for our machinery to work efficiently and we all want the best solution at the lowest price. However, to judge a thing only by its usefulness or price is a form of brutality. When we follow utilitarianism, we end up knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Utilitarianism seems cheerfully practical. It seems right, but the completely practical and cost effective person ends up being cruel. People are treated like machines. Either they do the job or they don’t. If they don’t they are out. Unnecessary employees are “terminated.” Even worse, human lives are judged according to their practicality or cost. Does it seem too expensive to have a baby? The utilitarian says, “Abort the pregnancy.” Is it too expensive to keep old people, who have outlived their usefulness alive? The utilitarian solution is to put them to sleep.

If these three “ism’s” are sisters, then scientism is a blue stocking--an academic snob and Sister Utilitarian is a brisk, no nonsense, Nurse Ratchet. The third sister is Mother Materialism. By “materialism” I don’t mean “shop until you drop”. A better word for that type of greed or

acquisitiveness is “consumerism.” Instead, materialism is a deeper philosophy which holds that the material world is all there is. Beneath both utilitarianism and scientism is the assumption that there is no supernatural realm. What you see is what you get. Mother Materialism is a cynical old woman who sees through everything.

The materialist is also be an atheist, for if the physical realm is all there is, then there is no God, no judgement, no hope of heaven and no risk of hell. With such a philosophy a man can do anything he wants. Thus, materialism with her sister’s scientism and utilitarianism turns out to be not just three ugly sisters, but three monstrous gorgons who will (in the name of usefulness and the right price) terminate the weak, vulnerable or anyone who stands in their way.

It is easy to believe that we Catholics wouldn’t live by such terrible set of beliefs, but we make choices according to usefulness and the right price all the time, and often we make choices that go against higher principles just to get a bargain or make our lives more efficient or easy. Furthermore, don’t we often regard the Church in practical terms? We think the church is to “make the world a better place” or to make our lives better.

The antidote to materialism, scientism and utilitarianism is the second mark of the Church. By being “One” we counter individualism, sentimentalism and syncretism. By being “Holy” we counter utilitarianism, scientism and materialism. In this instance I am using the word “Holy” to indicate our belief in the supernatural. Holiness is only accomplished through the infusion of God’s supernatural grace in our lives, and the only way to counter the brutal beliefs of utilitarianism, materialism and scientism is to fully affirm the existence of the supernatural realm, and its daily interaction with our world.

Being “Holy” in this sense does not just mean being pious. It means learning to see the supernatural dimension behind the natural realm. It means having eyes to see the hand of God at work in and through and beneath and beyond all we can see. We develop this way of being “Holy” by increasing spiritual awareness in all that we do, but especially in our worship.

If we prayed and practiced our faith with a trembling awareness of the supernatural dimension, the temptation to value things only according to their usefulness or price would disappear. If we prayed and went to Mass more reverently-- truly believing in the supernatural dimension to our faith, then the three monstrous “ism’s” of utilitarianism, materialism and scientism would vanish from our lives, and our church would be renewed.

One of the ways to develop this “Holy” aspect to our lives is to attend Eucharistic adoration regularly and to worship at Mass with more care and reverence. At Mass we are at the very threshold of heaven. We are in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, surrounded by all the heavenly host. The more we realize this in our hearts, the more we will not only affirm that we believe in the “Holy” church, but we will also begin to live it in our lives.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker