Points to Ponder August 15-21, 2021

This week’s Points to Ponder are the second installment from Chapter 6 of *The Holy Longing* by Father Ronald Rolheiser.

Sunday

Hence the basis for Christian ecclesial community, church, is a gathering around the person of Jesus Christ and a living in his Spirit. And that Spirit too is not some vague bird or abstract tonality. The spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, is defined in scripture as charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness, and chastity. Living in these virtues is what binds us into community in such a way that we are immune from separation by distance, temperament, race, color, gender, ideology, social status, history, creed, or even death. All who live in these virtues are one body with each other and constitute church.

Monday

To be church is, therefore, to celebrate the word of Christ and the Eucharist. But, properly understood, that implies more than simply going to church on Sunday. The Christian scriptures speak of church community as somehow meaning a common life, of “having everything in common.”

Tuesday

It demands that there be some real sharing of life together, namely, that we pray together; that we celebrate our rites of passage together; that we celebrate some of our everyday joys, fears, and feasts together; that we are responsible to each other and open to each other as regards mutual correction and challenge; that we are responsible together for the ministry of the church; and that we have some common sharing of finances (even if this means only that we contribute financially to the support of our local church and its projects.

Wednesday

“Unless you eat my flesh, you cannot have life within you.” When Jesus says this, as we have already seen, he is referring to his sarx, his flawed, exzemed body, as it is met in the community of believers, and he is mandating that we must also deal with this if we wish to deal with God. In essence, this means two things: First, that community is a constitutive element within the Christian quest. My task is not to walk to God as an individual but to be within a community that is worshipping God. Second, what is taught here is that, in this life, whenever I meet the presence of God within community, I will not meet it in its pure form. All communities of faith mediate the grace of God in a very mixed way. Sin, pettiness, and betrayal are always found alongside grace, sanctity, and fidelity.

Thursday

Carlo Carretto, the great Italian spiritual writer, once wrote a little tribute to the church which captures well both its scandal and its grace. In the closing section of perhaps his most mature book, *I Sought and I Found*, Caretto addresses the church in these words:

How much I must criticize you, my church and yet how much I love you!

You made me suffer more than anyone and yet I owe more to you than anyone.

I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence.
You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness.

Never in this world have I seen anything more compromised, more false, yet never have I touched anything more pure, more generous or more beautiful.

Countless times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face—and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms!

No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you.

Then too—where would I go?

To build another church?

But I could not build one without the same defects, for they are my defects. And again, if I were to build another church, it would be my church, not Christ’s church.

No, I am old enough. I know better!

Friday
What does it mean to be catholic? Jesus gave the best definition of the term when he said: “In my Father’s house there are many rooms.” This is not a description of a certain geography in heaven but a revelation of the breadth of God’s heart. The bosom of God is not a ghetto. God has a catholic heart—in that catholic means universal, wide, all-encompassing. The opposite of a catholic is a fundamentalist, a person who had a heart with one room.
Thus, spirituality of the church needs to emphasize wide loyalties and inclusivity.

Saturday
The task of church is to stand toe to toe, shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart with people absolutely different from ourselves—but who, with us, share one faith, one Lord, one baptism, and one God who is Father and Mother of all. To live and worship beyond differences is what it means to have a bosom that is not a ghetto.