

## WHY go to Church on Sunday?

**There is really no special difference between what the pagan wants and what the Christian wants.** Peace. Inner peace. The strength of spirit which sustains us through all of life's challenges and particularly during its times of hurt, of disappointment, of sorrow, and of conflict.

All of us seek that peace which enables us to live tranquil and secure lives in the midst of a chaotic and threatening world.

**The difference between the pagan and the Christian** comes in how he or she gets what both want. The pagan seeks such assurance, such peace, in transitory and inadequate places: wealth, power, position and such. Or he seeks it through false religion (astrology, New Age-ism, yogi, jogging, *etc.*). These things, however promising, always seem in the end to fail, right at the crisis.

The Christian, on the other hand, seeks his peace in only one place – a person, Jesus Christ.

**To say that the Christian finds his or her peace in the person of Jesus Christ** is to say it all, yet not enough. For the Christian, to know peace is to know Jesus. But that is a lifelong process, which is approached steadily, by degrees, and the result is proportionate in no small way to the amount of effort invested. Jesus is always ready to meet us, to share His life with us and to enrich our own struggling lives – but He cannot, will not, force us. We must get to know Him. To know Him is

indeed to love Him and to receive His peace.

**The question for those who would find lasting, eternal peace**, then, is, “How do we come to know Jesus? We have heard of Him, how do we meet Him?”

The answer is not strange or complex: we meet Him in the Church. The Church is His body, made available by Him for the singular purpose of introducing Himself to you! Now the Church is composed of all who are baptized into the Church. You meet a part of the Church when you meet another Christian! How simple, and yet how difficult. Sad to say, Christians are not always identifiably such, nor do we usually meet them on those deep and private terms.

**So how do we meet Jesus?** The best way is to go where Christians gather *as* Christians – in Church, especially on Sundays. Yes, we can meet with Christians elsewhere and at other times, but *do* we? Yes, we can meet with Jesus alone, but *do* we?

**Sunday Church attendance is the surest, best way of getting to know Jesus and beginning the process of entering into His peace.**

So the answer to our question of “Why go to Church?” is simple: to get to know Jesus.

Elie Wiesel tells the story of one of the Hasidic *rebbe*s, or rabbis, when the great man was but a young boy studying in the local *yeshiva*. The teacher noticed that the lad was occasionally absent from the

classroom where he was studying *Torah*. Finally, one day, he followed the boy into the surrounding woods where he discovered the rabbi-to-be praying. “What are you doing?” he asked. The boy replied, “Praying.” “But why do you come all the way out here to pray?” the teacher pressed. “Don’t you know that everywhere God is the same?” “Oh, yes,” the lad replied, “God is everywhere the same ... but I am not.”

**Surely Jesus can be met everywhere.** Even, presumably, on the golf course, though many seek and few find! But *we* are not everywhere the same. To go to Church is to put us in touch with Jesus in a unique way.

He speaks to us through the words of Scripture and challenges us through the sermon, He encounters us as we open ourselves to Him in prayer, humbles us through the acknowledgement of our sins, and lifts our spirits through song. But most importantly, He feeds our souls, becomes part of us, when we receive the Holy Communion.

**The mature Christian** will, of course, read the Bible daily and pray at least once during the day. He may read spiritual literature or listen to religious music. Some of us will do that but many will not.

Sunday worship represents the one time during the week when we can devote ourselves exclusively to God, to meeting Jesus. And it is, normally, the only place where we participate in the Holy Eucharist

and receive Him mystically into the depths of our souls.

**The world is very much with us**, indeed. It tugs continually at us, urging its deformed values upon us at every turn. If we are to resist, we must take action. And that action is to worship God in Church.

We need a “time out”. Oh, certainly, we can get by for a while, perhaps, on momentum. But finally, the friction of life drags us down, our lives begin to clutter up and to lose direction. We think less and less of Jesus and more and more about ourselves. What little peace we had wears thinner and thinner.

**We have, in the words of Mark Twain, “neglected our habits.”** We have neglected the habits of concern for others, of love for family and those beyond, of devotion to that which is greater than we are, of moral discernment. And that is because, most particularly, we have neglected the habit of going to Church.

We are in the process of walking away from a friend, the only friend who can sustain our lives, give them meaning, and preserve them eternally – Jesus Christ. You are in trouble or headed there when you must *decide* to go to Church; the fulfilled, spiritually mature person *assumes* he will go to Church – it’s a habit (and a pleasure).

Of course, after we have gone to Church for a period of time, we recognize that **there are other reasons** for doing so. We come to realize that, not only do we bene-

fit, but God actually requires us (in the Fourth Commandment on keeping holy the Sabbath Day) to devote time each week to Him and His purposes.

We come to appreciate the discipline and sacrifice in the spiritual life, even when we don’t want to do something. We come to see that what we give to the Church and to God (the weight of our presence and fellowship, the obedience He desires) outweighs what we *think* we may or may not “get out of it”.

We begin to understand that the workings of sin and evil are more subtle than we imagined and that the workings of God are subtler still. And we arrive at that point when we perceive ourselves “out of kilter” without that weekly remembrance of His great mercy and love.

Those who go to Church regularly *know*, for the most part, why they go. If you are wondering why, perhaps it’s time you did so too. Oh, no mistake about it: not every visit will be a mountaintop experience. But over the long haul, this is how we get to know Jesus. And it is how our lives are truly filled with His peace.

**See you in Church next Sunday!**

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