



Ask, Father James:

Why do I have to attend church Mass every Sunday (can't I/one just be a Christian at home)?

The last instruction of Jesus to his followers concerning church was "take and eat; take and drink and Do this always...." (Matthew 26:26). Many people who were surveyed on why going to church was important responded that they actually just love receiving Holy Communion and blessing each week. They confessed that they see the Eucharist as been at the very center of their spiritual practice every week. Every Sunday they welcomed people to their parish and they are happy to know that everyone who came wanted to meet Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. They also confessed that taking Holy Communion is like being cleansed by Jesus from anything bad. Taking him in clears everything for me! someone said.

A study by Stanford University anthropology professor T.M. Luhmann says; "One of the most striking scientific discoveries about religion in recent years is that going to church weekly is good for you." The study finds that attending and participating in religious services on a regular basis will promote healthy behaviours such as avoiding substance abuse and adding to your circle of friends. It might even extend your life.

Another research findings released by the Institute for Family Studies suggest that couples who pray together and who have friends who attend church services with them report being happier with their relationship than those who don't. The study also showed that men of faith are happier with their partners. Bradford Wilcox, the study's author, said prayer is a stronger predictor of relationship quality than other religious factors and it is also a better predictor of relationship quality than race, education, age, sex, or region." He concluded that churches/temples are the only places men are encouraged to think about their spouse.

One cannot be "church" alone and by themselves. The idea of church connotes many believers coming together and gathered for worship and listen to scripture. The spiritual and social value of getting together with other Christians cannot be underestimated. Jesus says, when two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst (Matthew 18:20). In Hebrews 10:24-25 God calls His people not to stop meeting together: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

In our parish, I see the joy on the faces of our people as they arrive for Mass every weekend. Coming together every week is a testimony to how God is working in each person's life and others come to be encouraged. I also always look forward to going to the Knights of Columbus, the perogy dough making and pinching meetings and to the CWL meetings or the coffee fellowships after all our weekend Masses. The joy and happiness that radiates amongst church members when they gather is infectious. It is joyful to hand around church. Find a church group and join and participate actively, it will enhance your spiritual, social and quality of your overall health.

There is need for all of us to take up the challenge. In church, we are invited to glimpse eternity—to participate in the fellowship of the saints and the breaking of the bread and in church there is a love available here that nothing else on earth will ever explain, diminish, or destroy. It's a love that overcomes every barrier of suspicion and hatred we humans construct. Acquaintance with God brings peace.

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