

Notice that Paul, with the authoritative inspiration of God, states we should not be “forsaking our own assembling together,” which is to say we should not abandon going to Church. He also states that it is “the habit of some” people to cease attending the assembling together of the Church. The temptation to forsake attending Church existed even in the Apostle’s day! It is imperative, therefore, that we heed his word and persevere in attending.

Does this imply that missing a Sunday here or there means one has forsaken the assembling together of the Church? Certainly not! There are many worthy reasons which might cause a person to miss Church, things like illness, infirmity, *unavoidable* work, periodic vacations, or other special circumstances. Apart from these, making a habit of missing Church is a grave insult to God, to the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He gave for you out of love for you. It is a scorning of the means of connection He ordained for His children. It would be impossible to rightly commune with God if one had such a spirit of habitually avoiding Church.

God does not require us to go to Church merely to check off a list, or because He is grumpy and wants people to be like robots, or even for His own sake, but that we may receive and live within the salvation He freely offers in Communion with His Son through the New Covenant. There is no other Way than Jesus Christ, and apart from His Body one stands apart from Christ and His saving grace. To forsake the Church is to forsake God. To forsake the Church is to forsake salvation. The path to Church should be as familiar as the road home: “Fathers and mothers: Go and lead your child by the hand into the Church.” Nothing is more important than salvation.

And so, to answer the question of whether we really need to come to Church we ask, do you need God? The way in which one answers that question determines the answer to the question about attending Church. Yes, God is everywhere, but His will for you is to meet Him also in the Church. But Church is so far! There are too many hypocrites! I’m too busy! It’s so boring! If those complaints too often persuade, know that they come from a heart that does not yet recognize its absolute need for God, its utter dependence on Him, and therefore its need for the salvation that is extended to it freely in the body and blood of our Lord, which can only be found in the Church.

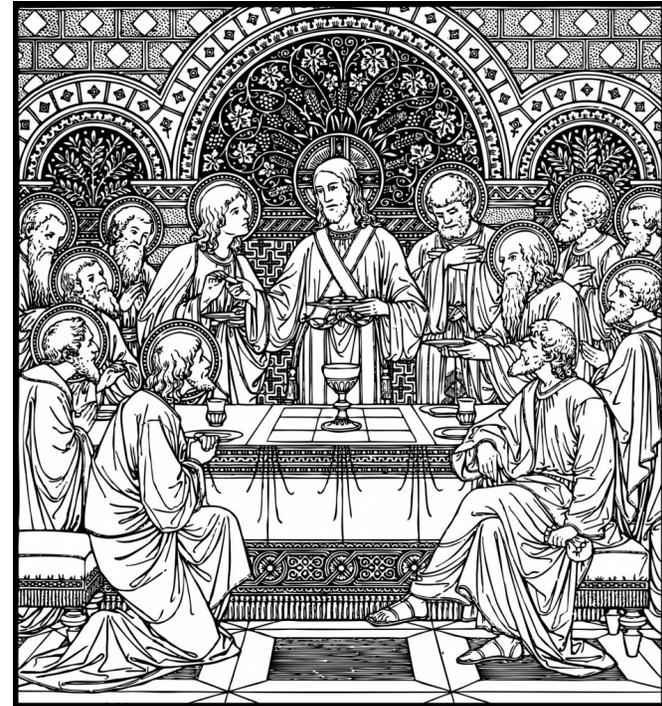
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*Essentials Series*

## Do I Really Need to Go to Church?

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## Why Attending Church is Essential

by

Fr. Joshua Schooping

God is everywhere. In fact, we regularly affirm in our daily prayers that God is everywhere present and fills all things. There is even a common rhyme: There is no spot where God is not. Therefore, due to God's omnipresence, many conclude that they do not need to worship God in a building or in a group. They don't need to go to Church in order to connect with God, they say, for God is equally accessible in all places and at all times. They can worship God alone, at the beach, in the forest, the mountains, at home, or anywhere they happen to find themselves. Church is whatever and wherever they want it to be, and is an optional exercise, not necessarily for everyone.

Although the foregoing contains some beautiful sentiments, for certainly God is everywhere and ought to be worshipped everywhere, a closer look will show that this is not the whole truth, and the truth that is left out is indispensable. For in the Scriptures the Church is identified with the Body of Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ, and so to say that Church is optional is to say that the Body of Christ is optional. But Christ Himself is our Connection with God the Father and God Himself, and so to say that Church is optional is to end up saying that connecting with God is optional, for it is not possible to connect with Christ apart from Christ. But in order to see this more clearly we will have to look at what Christ Himself says.

Christ, "when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me. And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.'" (Luke 22:19-20)

Notice that Christ identified the cup which is poured out as the new covenant in His blood. The blood is the covenant. What is a covenant? A covenant is an unbreakable bond established between two parties that binds them together according to the terms of the covenant. Notice also that it is a blood covenant. In other words, the guarantee of the Covenant is Christ's own blood, which is to say His very life stands as the guarantee of all covenant obligations and promises. Apart from His body and blood there is no covenant, no bond between us and Him. He is the Connector between man and God, and as such if there is no covenant bond with Him then there is no connection to God. The body and blood of Christ therefore constitute what the Church *is*, and without this there is no ground for the Church's existence. In short, the Church exists in and as the Body of Christ on earth.

St. Paul teaches the same: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Again we are confronted with the truth that the means of connection, the actual bond with God, is established through the new covenant in Christ's blood. It is the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup that establishes us as members of this covenant Body. It thus simply does not do to say Church is just anywhere we happen to want it to be. Church is where the body and blood of Christ are partaken of as part of a covenant bond. Although God is everywhere, and we worship Him everywhere, and even pray without ceasing, the mechanism of connection with God cannot be separated from the body and blood that happens only in the Church. Anyone who foregoes or refuses to attend Church therefore foregoes their connection with Christ, and without Christ one does not have God.

Looking again at the sentiments which are so often expressed in this day and age, it is untrue that God is equally accessible at all times and places. If one ignores the Church, then one ignores the very God they are proclaiming to connect with, for God established the Way to connect with Him there, and He offers it freely to all who approach with faith. Of course, one can pray to Him and connect with Him thus at any time and at all places, but God establishes even that connection on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, on Christ's giving of His body and blood for the life of the world. Apart, then, from this body and blood, if one willfully ignores His new covenant, then their prayers are being said in a spirit that is contrary to God and His revealed will.

St. Paul teaches: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some*, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:23-27)