

23 I believe in God but I don't need to go to Church.

I believe in God but I don't need to go to Church. What sort of God, you could ask, because followers of the God and Father of Jesus come together – literally. Yet it's those followers who often cause people to say they'll take God but pass on his church!

'I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian' writes the senior devil to the junior devil in C.S.Lewis' Screwtape Letters. *'There is no need to despair; hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed...One of our greatest allies is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patients see is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate...when (a) patient goes inside...he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided...provided that (they) sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak... or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous'.*

I believe in God but I don't need to go to Church. Perhaps you would if you saw her as God sees her – as she really is - gloriously *spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity* rather than as a handful of curious looking people with *boots that squeak* and *odd clothes*! If you saw the significance to God of his Church, with all its foibles, you might perhaps repent of the line you draw between them!

It's part of the DNA of Christian faith that people can't keep it to themselves. Just like joy, it's something people need to share *together*. Christianity calls people to work together at God's praise and service. Once you get the joy you want to share it before the Lord in worship and to pass it on by witnessing to Jesus.

Your gifts are needed within the body of Christ to be empowered by the Spirit along with the rest of your Christian community to spread God's word.

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ St. Paul says to the Corinthians *You are the body of Christ and individually members of it* (1 Corinthians 12v12, 27)

Why go to Church? Because the Lord is risen Christians mark the Lord's Day by gathering to celebrate. Missing out on Sunday is missing encounter with Jesus in the midst of his people (Acts 2:42). As the writer to the Hebrews says to his readers 'do not neglect to meet together' (10:25).

If you go to many churches for Sunday Eucharist you see people standing up as part of the high point of the celebration, standing and sometimes stretching out their arms to pray the Lord's Prayer. They stand and join in this joint

aspiration: *'Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done'*. To see the church joining together in that forward looking pledge to action is something very powerful and infectious.

Christians gather on Sunday to hear God's word, break bread and be consecrated to a work of world transformation – for God's name to be hallowed, his rule to extend and his will to triumph. Is there a greater cause in the universe?

Although churches tend to meet in one place under one roof Sunday by Sunday they're communities on the move drawn forward by the hope of Christ's Return. In what is revealed in scripture about this mysterious future the church stands at the centre alongside Jesus, just like a bride standing alongside her bridegroom. *Christ loved the church* says the letter to the Ephesians *and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind'* (5v25-27)

I believe in God but I don't need to go to Church. The best direct answer is 'refresh your vision of God to take in Jesus, the heavenly bridegroom, and be made part of his bride'. The best indirect answer is for the cleansing of God's church from *spot or wrinkle* so to advance that people won't need arguments to persuade them but will *want* to be part of her.