

The Christian who Never Shows Up

Why do I need to go to church? Why do I need a church at all? Why can't I have an un-mediated relationship with God in my own private life and on my own terms?

These are all valid questions which deserve an answer. And they are of the sort which are behind the fastest growing religious group in the country, "The Nones." The people in this group have decided that faith is a purely private matter between the believer and his/her God. Church doesn't make sense to them on so many levels. And it is perfectly logical to think that one can have a good moral and devotional life without the bother and the hassle of going to Mass on Sunday.

I cannot take up every reason there may be for this attitude or philosophy. And so the one that I will target is a sort of myth; the myth of a pure, unmediated relationship with God. The "purity" here is in the notion that there isn't anyone or anything between the believer and God; there is no middle-man, minister, interpreter, nor any other.

Whatever one wants to call this, it could only ever be quasi-Christian at best. After all, the Bible mediates God's revelation to people. And, the Bible represents multiple sources of mediation with respect to how and what God wants to reveal of himself: In other words, before there ever was a printed page, there was a patriarch, a prophet, a people, and a history. The revelation of the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ did not descend in individual packets of light into the minds and hearts of people. People experienced and received God's self-revelation **with** other people, in communities, and in the unfolding of their history . . . together.

The core of the Christian Faith is the belief that the Creator is a "communion of persons" in a unity of being. The Biblical revelation tells us that we were created in the "image and likeness" of our Creator. On the other end of Divine Revelation we are told that the Heavenly Father subjected all things under Christ and Christ, in turn, subjected himself to the Father (in our Human Nature) so that God may be "**all in all**", (1 Cor 15:28).

This ideal is anticipated in the life of parish churches within dioceses. The dioceses are shepherded by bishops who are in union with the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter the Apostle.

Unity at this level is too vast to appreciate on a personal level: we experience and anticipate the "communion of saints," (where God is "all in all), in the smaller communities of family and parish.



Your life and your salvation are not just about you: The Life of a "None" is attractive from the standpoint of not having to deal with the messiness of community and institutional structures. However, the Biblical conception of Christianity very much includes participation in an institutional, structured church. For example, Paul writes to Titus, "*I left you in Crete so that you might set right what remains to be done and appoint presbyters in every town . . .*" And, thereafter, he describes in detail the type of character Bishops and Presbyters must have in their roles, (*Presbyter* means 'elder:' they serve the bishop as "pastors" in smaller communities. We call these "priests" because of their ritual function at Mass)

What interest would Paul or any other Apostle have in organizing the Church in localities under Bishops and Priests if it were not to facilitate smaller **gatherings** of the greater reality? And, of course, the focus is on the Lord's Day and the celebration of the Eucharist. This Sacrament of Holy Communion anticipates the "Wedding Feast of the Lamb in Heaven." We attend Mass in mutual support of one another and as a witness of faith that the Lord Jesus makes himself really present. After all, his instruction from the Last Supper was quite explicit: "**Do this in remembrance of me.**"

A Church of One makes as much sense as an "Army of One;" It doesn't . . . certainly not in Christian Biblical terms.