

You Are Needed

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An often cited early Church document expresses the importance of participation at Sunday Eucharist:

When you are teaching, command and exhort the people to be faithful to the assembly of the Church. Let them not fail to attend, but let them gather faithfully together. Let no one deprive the Church by staying away; if they do, they deprive the body of Christ of one of its members.

For you must not think only of other but of yourself as well, when you hear the words that our Lord spoke: "Who does not gather with me scatters" (Mt. 12:30). Since you are the members of Christ, you must not scatter yourselves outside the Church by failing to assemble there. For we have Christ for our Head, as he himself promised and announced, so that "you have become sharers with me."

Do not, then, make light of your own selves, do not deprive our Savior of his members, do not rend, do not scatter his Body!" (quoted from *Didascalia Apostolorum* in *Spring Time of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, Lucien Deiss, ed., Matthew J. O'Connell, trans. [Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1967/1979], 176-7).

By not participating in Sunday Eucharist, we "deprive the body of Christ of one of its members." Each one of us as members of Christ's body is important. An analogy would be the family reunion. If one family member does not show, the reunion is incomplete. The Church gathered for Sunday Eucharist is likewise lacking when one person is missing. We know the parable of the lost sheep. This parable has the same point. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to find the lost sheep. Each person is needed in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his recent Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei* ("The Door of Faith"), suggests implicitly why it is important for us to participate in Sunday Eucharist. He says, "The 'door of faith' (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering



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us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that last a lifetime" (1).

Sunday Eucharist is the primary time when we enter through "the door of faith" to be transformed by Christ's grace. At Sunday Eucharist, we as the Church gathered meet Christ in his Word and in his Body and Blood. We enter deeper into communion (union) with Christ and the Church. As the pope explains, participating in the life of the Church "makes it possible to

perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. . . . What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end" (15).

The pope often calls the liturgy a "school of faith." Through the liturgy, Christ, the great Teacher, teaches us to love as God loves us. By not participating in Sunday Eucharist, we miss the great privilege of being enlightened by Christ's Word, Body, and Blood. Liturgy is a door to faith where we meet Christ present to and with the liturgical assembly. When we open ourselves to Christ's presence, we grow and deepen our faith.

Having been enlightened by Christ in the liturgy, we are sent from the liturgy to witness to Christ's transforming presence that allows the world to be brightened by our faith-filled words and deeds. Indeed, each one of us is needed.

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