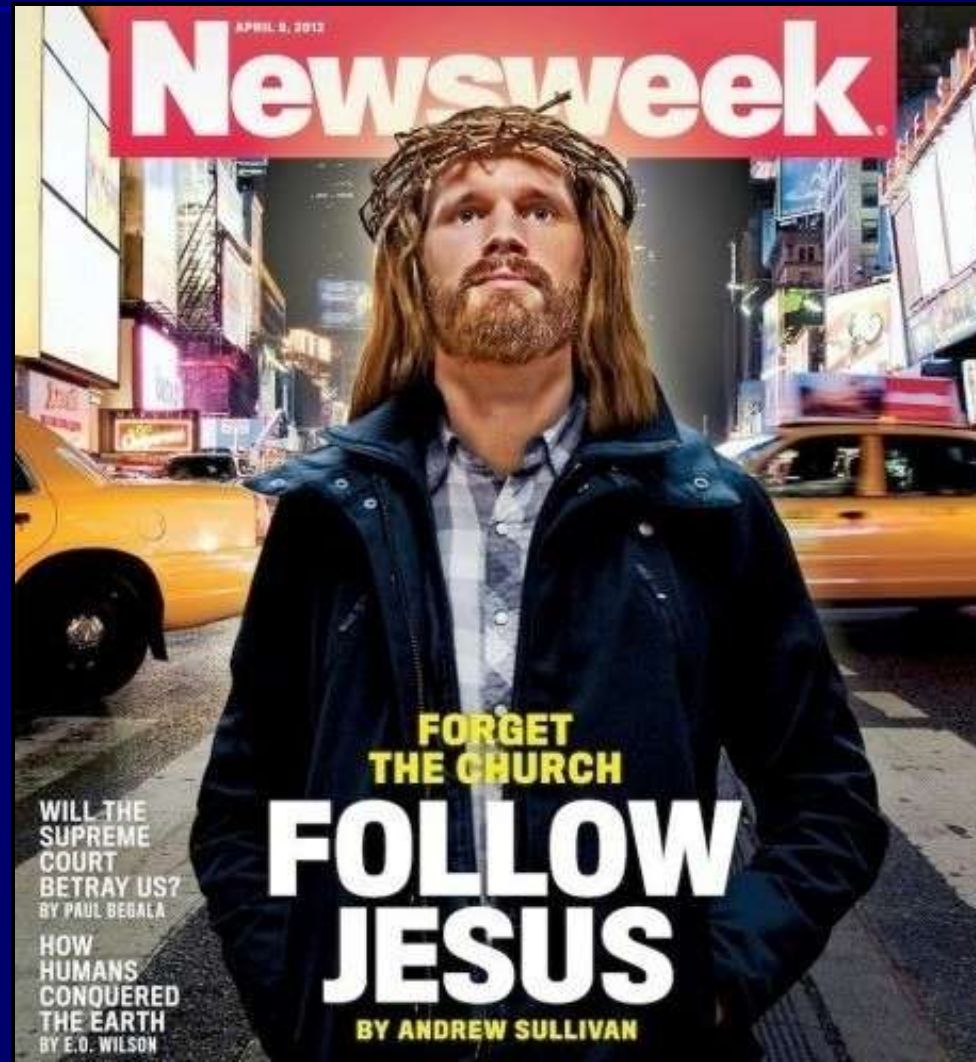


***Why Go to
Church?***

Can I Follow Jesus Without Going to Church?



Unchurched Americans

- 1/2 of adults do not go to church
 - 12% non-Christian
 - 25% atheist/agnostic
 - 63% believe in God/consider Christian
- Only 20% born after 1970 attend Mass
- “Spiritual” OK, “Religious” Not OK
- Let’s examine why it **IS** important to follow Jesus **IN** the Church

Reflection and Discussion

- **Handout #1**
 - **Fill-in individually**
 - **Then discuss in small groups**

Supportive Community

- **Living a truly Christian life is not easy**
 - It's hard to do difficult things alone
 - Following Jesus fully can be tough work
- **A supportive community is important**
 - To receive help we need from God and others to live an authentic Christian life
 - Without fellow Christians, our faith would be stunted, fade away and die
 - A single coal will lose its fire

Supportive Community

- We don't go to Church to demonstrate our holiness or hide our sins
 - Christians are still sinners
 - May seem like hypocrites to others
 - “The Church is *not* a haven for saints, but a hospital for sinners”
- Being active at Church enables us to receive God's help and the support of others to improve our lives
 - Christ knew this and left us His Church

Christ Willed His Church

- Jesus called the Twelve Apostles
 - Jesus said, “You are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church.**” (Matt. 16:18)
 - Has lasted for 2,000 years (see Acts 5:38-39)
- What did Jesus mean when he asked Paul, “Why are you persecuting **me?**”
 - Jesus equates Himself with the Church
 - They are inseparable
 - Christ is Groom, Church is Bride (Eph. 5:21-33)
 - Christ remains present in the Church
 - “Christ is the Head of His Body, the Church.”

Christ Willed His Church

“In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.” (Pope Francis)

Christ Willed His Church

- **Holy Spirit generates the Church**
 - The Church is the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit and His works
 - Pentecost: “Birthday of the Church”
- **Holy Spirit makes Christ’s Power present today through the Sacraments**
 - Gift of God only through the Church
 - “Sacraments are ‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church.” (CCC #1116)

Christ Willed the Sacraments

- We not only believe in the Incarnation, we have an incarnational Faith
 - Christ is encountered in the seven Sacraments, especially the Eucharist
- Eucharist is “source and summit of the Christian life”

(CCC #1324, quoting Vatican II)
- *Video: What generations of Catholics have said about the Mass*

Christ Willed the Eucharist

- **What quotes were most striking?**
- **Is there a disconnect between our typical experience of Mass and what these quotes say about Mass?**
 - **If so, why?**
- **Maybe we need to learn more about what really happens at Mass**
 - **It's not about mere entertainment**

Mass: Worship God and Pray Together

- Two “lungs” of prayer
 - Personal Prayer and Liturgical Prayer
 - “Private prayer is like straw scattered here and there: If you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky; public prayer is like that.” (St. John Vianney)
- Join prayers of Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication (“A.C.T.S.”)
- *Video: Fr. Barron on why go to Mass*

Mass: Hear Word of God

- During Liturgy of the Word, we hear God speak in readings from scripture
 - Also hear Christ’s voice in the homily
 - If we listen with right frame of mind, we will receive a personal message
 - “[B]y the preaching of God’s word, faith is nourished and grows in the grace-filled encounter with the Risen Lord...”

(Pope Benedict XVI)
- By hearing, we are prepared to enter into Christ’s ultimate act of love

Mass: Re-Presents Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross

- **During Liturgy of the Eucharist, we share in Christ's sacrifice on the cross**
 - At Mass, we join in a special way with the event of the crucifixion
- **Jesus established the Eucharist at Last Supper (“This is my body...”)**
 - Only in light of Jesus' words at the Last Supper is Calvary's meaning understood

Mass: Re-Presents Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross

- At each Mass, God makes present and available to us, with lavish generosity, the saving power of the cross
 - “It is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, the work of our redemption is accomplished.”
(Vatican II)
- *Archbishop Alexander Sample: Mass is re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice*

Mass: Re-Presents Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross

- **At Mass, we participate in Christ's redeeming the world when we unite our sufferings with those of Christ on cross**
 - **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church.” (Colossians 1:24)**
- **Mass more than just a memorial**
 - **Jesus wanted all his followers through every generation to “take and eat” in a direct encounter His very body, blood, soul & divinity**

Mass: Be Filled With And Become Like Jesus Christ

- **At the Consecration, bread and wine become Body and Blood of Christ**
 - Spiritual food for spiritual life (Jn 6:53-56)
- **“We are what we eat”**
 - By Holy Communion we receive grace to become more like Christ
- **St. Augustine:**
 - “Believe what you receive,
Receive what you believe,
Become what you receive.”

Mass: Strengthens Us for Our Mission

- **Our mission is to go forth to love and serve the Lord and one another**
 - “By their fruits shall you know them”
(Matthew 7:16)
- **Jesus does not send us out as orphans**
 - Rather, He equips us for our mission
- **At Mass, Christ strengthens us in His community, forms us by His Word, and nourishes us in our Holy Communion with Him**

Mass: The Commands of God, Jesus, and the Church

- **3rd Commandment: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.”**
- **At the Last Supper, Jesus asked us to “do this in remembrance of me”**
- **Catholic Church requires Mass attendance on Sundays & Holy Days**
- ***Video: Fr. Larry Richards on Mass is more than an obligation***



Conclusion

- **The strength we receive from Mass will lead us nearer to God, spur us on in our struggles against sin, and empower us to love others**
 - **The Christ we receive in the Eucharist asks us and enables us to go forth and do God's work in the world**
- ***Video: Fr. Robert Barron's recap of a truly Catholic spirituality***

Summary

- **We Need a Supportive Community**
- **Christ Willed:**
 - His Church
 - The Sacraments
 - The Eucharist
- **Christ asks us to do what He wills**
 - “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)
 - “Whoever rejects you rejects me.” (Lk 10:16)
 - *Video: Fr. Claude Burns (aka Fr. Pontifex) “Why I Love Religion, And Love Jesus”*

Reflection and Discussion

- **Handout #2**
 - **Fill-in individually**
 - **Then discuss in small groups**

Closing

“It is not possible to find Jesus outside the Church. The great Pope Paul VI said: ‘Wanting to live with Jesus without the Church, following Jesus outside of the Church, loving Jesus without the Church is an absurd dichotomy.’ And the Mother Church that gives us Jesus gives us our identity that is not only a seal, it is a belonging. Identity means belonging. This belonging to the Church is beautiful.”

- Pope Francis

Questions?

Comments?

***Why Go to
Church?***