

Whitsuntide 2010

Dear Members and Friends,

A generation or two ago most people went to church almost every Sunday. A variety of religious and social factors played a role in this, but then the churches also spoke often of our “duty” to be at service on Sunday. If you were Roman Catholic, it warned you of the yawning chasm of hell before you if you missed Sunday Mass. Episcopalians also took very seriously our “Sunday obligation” to “worship God in his Church” on the Lord’s Day, as the Prayer Book said. While this affirmation sometimes degenerated into a legalistic rule devoid of understanding, the principle is nevertheless true: Christians worship each week on Sunday *in church*, unless by serious cause prevented. We modern Christians need a reminder, perhaps in our day a sharp one, that Sunday is, indeed, the *Lord’s Day*— a day set apart from the others for communal worship, and then for rest and spiritual renewal. The Commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day is not a suggestion, and it is no joke. We need to recover both a sense of personal devotion, and also of obligation and duty in our thinking about Sundays.

To begin this we need a clearer understanding that the Church is not a club that we attend when convenient or inclined. It is the baptised community of Jesus of Nazareth. Its members are joined and disciplined by their life together. When we gather every Sunday as Jesus’ community, we re-affirm our commitment to him, and to the mission of reconciliation he entrusted to us. We gather with regularity on the day set apart by holy Commandment, the Lord’s Day, first to render the worship due to God Almighty; but also because someone’s zeal needs to be inspired, someone’s faith needs to be corrected, someone’s praise needs to be supported; because sins need to be forgiven, sorrows healed, and joys shared. Sometimes it is yours, sometimes it is mine, sometimes it is a stranger’s need. This Lord’s Day gathering provides *an assured time when the community will be there to meet those needs*, to offer what the Prayer Book calls “our bounden duty and service”, both to God *and* our neighbour, as the Church.

It is this sense of communal identity, of our mutual obligation to our fellow-parishioners, and of regular availability to the world, which is often missing in our thinking today. Frequently we encounter an individualistic approach to God that is alien to genuine Christianity. Extreme examples can be heard in the old lines about not needing to be in a building to worship, or being able to worship as well on a golf course or fishing as in the church, or “my relationship with God does not need a Sunday appointment”. These attitudes are simply non-starters for a Christian. They are a totally self-centred approach to spirituality and worship, which finds no place in authentic Christianity. Thinking this way excludes any concern for fellow-parishioners’ needs or the needs of the community of faith, to say nothing of the needs of the world. Real Christianity, by definition, is always and only found in a *community* of faith centred in a *common* relationship with God through Jesus.

Every other member of your parish church has every right to expect to see you week by week and on principal Holy Days, and to be able to depend upon your presence, as you have promised in Baptism and Confirmation. So, too, does every stranger who might want to find God in Christ in your church. May our joy in the risen Christ, and our love for our neighbour, keep us faithful in worship!

Yours in Christ Jesus our hope,



Rector of Saint John’s in the Village