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I Don't Need to Go to Church, Do I?

We all ask ourselves that question from time to time. Maybe the music's not too good, or the morning is too cold, or we don't really like the people we worship with. There's an old joke that says a man woke up on Sunday morning and said to his wife, "I'm not going to church today. Everyone there hates me, they stare off into space when I'm talking, and they talk about me behind my back." To which his wife replied, "Honey, you've got to go, you're the pastor!"

I believe that the Christ-centered answer to our question is "Yes, we need to go to church." My reasoning is simple. When I cook supper for my family and my 6-year old says "I don't want to eat supper, I want to keep playing Mario Kart," my reply to him is "No, son, you need to come join us for supper."

Weekly worship is a foretaste of the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. Like all foretastes it lacks the body, impact, and power of the full thing. But it sustains us until we are finally seated at the heavenly table where the Saints feast forever.

Every Sunday morning our Dad calls us to his table, the table prepared in the humanity (the body and blood) of his Son, and the Spirit urges us on - even amid the cold weather and the strain of broken human relationships.

We need to go to church because the Holy Trinity has called us there for our own good and for the good of others.

Besides, your pastor will be discouraged if you don't show up. Here's a great quote from Gregory of Nyssa in which he comments in his Epiphany sermon on his congregation's sporadic attendance:

I confess that I feel a shepherd's affections, and I wish, when I am set upon this watch-tower, to see the flock gathered round about the mountain's foot: and when it so happens to me, I am filled with wonderful earnestness, and work with pleasure at my sermon, as the shepherds do at their rustic strains. But when things are otherwise, and you are straying in distant wanderings, as you did but lately, the last Lord's Day, I am much troubled, and glad to be silent; and I consider the question of flight from hence, and seek for the Carmel of the prophet Elijah, or for some rock without inhabitant; for men in depression naturally choose loneliness and solitude. ~

Gregory of Nyssa, *Oration on the Baptism of Christ*

Even the great Church Father was not immune from having his congregation appear and disappear from Sunday to Sunday. Yet when they were in attendance he encouraged them to attend more faithfully - for the sake of their own spiritual health and his.

We're all a part of the Father's family in Jesus and we do need to follow the Spirit's leadership and gather at the family table on the Lord's Day.

~ Jonathan Stepp