



Dear Friends,

My doorbell rang one morning and when I answered it, a frail elder stood before me. I could see she had had a stroke. She asked when the church, referring to St. Louise, would be opened. She simply “had to go to church.” We talked a bit and she told me of her struggles dealing with the stroke and, though she prayed, God didn’t seem to be answering. We spoke some about prayer. Then, I told her the parish was open for Mass at St. Barbara. She didn’t have a computer so she didn’t know that but said she wanted to attend next weekend and I gave her the information she needed to register. As she began to leave, I stopped her, offering to celebrate the Sacrament of the Sick with her. She eagerly agreed. After the celebration she left grateful for our visit. So was I.

When I first sat down to write this letter, I thought to lay out for you the step by step re-opening of our parish. I still think it is important for you to hear all that went into the reopening. However, the visit of that woman got me thinking. Most of us really want to get back to Mass. Why this urge to get together in church? For six months we have lived without the parish. So why do we feel this need to do all the work necessary to put this organization back together again? Why not just let it slip into history and move on? Others have.

The parish buildings, especially the churches, hold a special place in our lives and those familiar rituals seem to make us feel better. But why?

Our urge to get back together in a building for an hour of ancient rites must have deeper roots than routine or feeling good. And it does. We feel the need to come together because *only when we are together is Christ present in our lives*. “Where two or three gather in my name, I am there,” Jesus says in the Scriptures. It’s the Holy Spirit that’s behind the urging to do what’s necessary so we can again sit together *with Christ*.

A spiritual writer I once read wrote of the need to dig deeper into the things in our lives, to go below the surface. After the elder left I began to dig deeper. And I hit on something.

It’s not the rituals or ancient rites. It’s not the pageantry we sometime experience. It’s not the feel good. It’s Christ himself. That’s St. Paul’s main point which he keeps hammering at us. Christ is our life! Isn’t it Christ who defines what life means for us? Don’t we try to conduct our lives on what he said? What makes us label certain of our actions “sin”? Isn’t it because the “Word of God” says it is? We understand the whole of life through him. For us Christ gives meaning, purpose and hope for a future beyond the grave. Without him we’re lost; life loses its meaning.

Our longing to “get back to church” comes from deep down inside of us. We know we need Christ and we can find him when those who believe in him physically come together. I’m sure that lady who visited me that morning was no theologian and didn’t have a Ph.D. in spirituality. But she was Christ to me.

She knew down deep inside her that she had to get back together with us so she can cast her cares on the Lord. And she led me to take a closer look at what “church” is about.

At Mass we hear the “Word of the Lord.” St. John begins his Gospel by telling us Jesus is the Divine “Word” who chose to become one of us in order to teach us how to live. And in the process of our giving thanks to God for that Word, the Spirit changes our offering of the necessities of our life (food and drink) into the Body and Blood of Christ which we consume to give us the strength to live what we just heard in the readings. We may not be theologians or scripture scholars and the priest or deacon may not be a spell binding orator, but instinctively (i.e. the action of the Holy Spirit) we all know we have heard the Christ (“Word of the Lord”) and let him into our lives (Communion).

That’s what the elder was missing. She needed to hear Christ and needed him in her life right now to deal with her reality. And don’t we all?

I have heard about and read about people who claim to have been visited by an angel or even the Lord himself. That frail elder who rang my bell was one such visit. The Lord is among us. But we have to dig deeper to see him.

*Fr. Denis*