

Column

‘Church’, what does one look like? Put another way, what do you think of when you hear this word?

For example, do you think of a substantial building, perhaps with a tower and cross? Or, do you think of a voluntary association of likeminded people who get together once a week, not very much different from the Rotary or Optimist Clubs?

Well, there is an element of truth in both these concepts. Since the dawn of time people have set apart certain places for worship. In the Old Testament, God’s people, at God’s command, erected first the moveable tabernacle during their trek from Egypt to Canaan. In the Christian era, the faithful met first in homes and later in dedicated buildings. Physical structures do indeed have their place in the life of God’s believing people.

There is likewise an element of truth in the second concept. The Church is made up of people, and these people do meet together on a regular basis and have certain common goals and concerns, just as the clubs I have mentioned.

But, neither of these concepts is complete because the Church of the Living God is more than either a building or a club. It is rather a living organism. It is that body of which Christ is the head and all baptized believers are members . . . nothing less than the Body of Christ. Thus, when the Church teaches a child or cares for an aged person or comforts one bowed over with grief, in a very real sense, it is Christ doing these things.

Indeed, Christ identifies so closely with His believing people -- with His Church -- that when one does a good turn for one that is His, one does it to Jesus. By the same token, when a person rejects Christ's believing people or seeks to do them ill, he rejects Christ and seeks to do Christ ill.

The biblical basis for making this assertion is found in the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25: 4: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." "My brethren (which of course includes 'sisters') refers to all who have given their allegiance to Jesus the Messiah.

The physical manifestation of the Church in time and space is a group of Christians gathered for worship, nourished by Word and Sacrament and

living in the Spirit. They may meet in a great stone edifice or under some trees. It does not matter. Where His people are, there is Christ. Where Christ is, there is His Church.

What do you think of when you hear the word “Church”? You might look in the mirror.

O Almighty God, who has built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; Grant that, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, all Christians may be so joined together in unity of spirit, and in the bond of peace, that they may be an holy temple acceptable unto thee. Give the abundance of thy grace; that with one heart they may desire the prosperity of thy holy Apostolic Church, and with one mouth may profess the faith once delivered to the Saints. Defend them from the sins of heresy and schism; let not the foot of pride come nigh to hurt them, nor the hand of the ungodly to cast them down. And grant that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; that so they may walk in the ways of truth and peace, and at last be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting; through the merits of the same thy blessed Son Jesus Christ, the

*gracious Bishop and Shepherd of our souls, who
liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Holy
Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.*

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